This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Hosted by Google

Hosted by Google

CHARACTERS

AND

CRITICISMS.

BY

W. ALFRED JONES, A. M.

In Two Volumes.

VOL. I.

NEW YORK:
I. Y. WESTERVELT, 371 BROADWAY.
1857.

Hosted by Google

Hosted by Google

TO

CLEMENT C. MOORE, LL. D.,

MY FATHER'S FRIEND,

WHOSE REGARD FOR HIS MEMORY

HAS PROMPTED MANY KINDNESSES TO HIS SON,

THESE VOLUMES ARE INSCRIBED,

WITH SENTIMENTS OF GRATITUDE AND RESPECT,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

Hosted by Google

Hosted by Google

CONTENTS OF VOL. 1.

	PAGE.
I.—New-Old Essays of Addison and Steele	1
II.—Tyrone Power	12
III.—A few Homeric Nods in Mr. Hallam	15
IV.—Religious Novels	20
V.—Literary Ambassadors	28
VI.—The Prose Style of Poets	34
VII.—The Morality of Poverty	42
VIII.—Chapter on some Old and Later English Sonnets	50
IX.—Jeremy Taylor, the Spenser of Divinity	68
X.—Church Music	74
XI.—Mr. Braham	80
XII.—The Life and Adventures of Philip Quarll	82
XIII.—Walton's Lives	95
XIV.—Elijah Fenton	100
XV.—Swedenborgianism	108
XVI.—Religious Satire	118
XVII.—Prose of Barrow	123
XVIII.—The Poems of Bishop Corbet	127
XIX.—The Ladies' Library	135
XX.—The Early Maturity of Genius	143
XXI.—Notoriety	153
XXII.—Letters	160
XXIII.—Pope and his Friends	164
XXIV.—Gray and Cowper	175
XXV.—Amateur Authors and Small Critics	178
XXVI.—Female Novelists	186
XXVII.—Single-Speech Poets	199

Hosted by Google

XXVIII.—On Prefaces and Dedications..... 209
XXIX.—Religious Biography..... 220
XXX.—Titles..... 230
XXXI.—Minshull's Essayes and Characteres of a Prison and Prisoners..... 242
XXXII.—On Preaching..... 248
XXXIII.—Memoir of Dr. J. W. Francis..... 266
XXXIV.—Wm. S. Mount..... 277

Hosted by Google

INTRODUCTION.

The present final collection of his miscellaneous papers, originally written for, and printed in the *American Monthly Magazine*, *Arcturus*, the *Church Record*, the *Democratic and Whig Reviews*, *Boston Miscellany*, *Union Magazine*, *Literary World*, and other periodicals, is intended to include such of the writer's papers (chiefly of literary criticism) as have appeared to him worthy of preservation. With the exception of a few comparatively recent articles, they were mostly written and printed 1838–1845, and comprise a little more than one-half of his entire contributions to the press up to the present date.

Most of the papers here collected (since the publication of *The Analyst*, anonymously in 1839, and which was made up of lucubrations written the year and a half previously) have appeared already in the volumes of *Literary Studies* and *Essays upon Authors and Books*. Holding the doctrine of Hazlitt, however, to be sound, that a first edition is as good as MSS., as the impressions of all these three miscellanies were limited, and have been long since out of print, and as numerous typographical errors had crept in, as well as mistakes of fact and opinion, it was thought a new and correct edition might be favorably received by the present generation of readers, young students in particular, in college, the lovers of the choice old English literature, and those cultivated general readers to whom these miscellanies are unknown.

Hosted by Google

The papers selected from *The Analyst* embracing nearly two-thirds of the original volume, are placed in the appendix. In point of time, the earliest efforts of the writer and most of them brief after the classical models of Essay and Character-writing, they form a series of papers distinct from his later articles of a similar description.

The only two of his biographical sketches, which appeared to harmonize with the literary matter of which these volumes are composed, are included in the first volume and a few miscellaneous lucubrations heretofore uncollected in the second.

Dates are affixed to certain of the essays and criticisms to explain allusions and suggestions otherwise unseasonable, or to exhibit a chronological excuse for change of opinion. The article on the Opera, if now written, would be much changed and also the Thoughts on Bulwer would be greatly modified despite the generous commendation of the *North American Review*, April, 1840.

New York, March 2, 1857.

Hosted by Google

CHARACTERS AND CRITICISMS.

I.

NEW-OLD ESSAYS OF ADDISON AND STEELE.

It is not an infrequent occurrence in the case of voluminous writers, that a proportional moiety of their productions become after a short period succeeding to their decease, little known: and in the progress of a century, or even a still briefer space of time, almost obsolete. After the enthusiasm of party feeling, or the excitement of novelty has gradually cooled down into a sober appreciation of real merit, from a previous extravagant estimate of it—we begin to learn the true secret of excellence, to discriminate the peculiar and characteristic traits of the author and award him the palm which shall continue fresh and green in the eyes of posterity. Of many copious authors, how little is now generally read—a few versified translations, an ode, some satires, and a prose essay or two, with one play of Dryden; only two or three, out of the score of volumes that complete the edition of Swift. Of Voltaire's three score, a few satirical tales and historical compends: some two or three dialogues of Plato: the Essays and Advancement of Bacon: the Essay of Locke: a play, here and there, of the Old Dramatists: an occasional sonnet of a writer of a volume of sonnets. These are illustrations at hand: a very long list might be made of

Hosted by Google

the very fertile authors who have been popularly known as the writers of but one work of pre-eminent ability. Bunyan, Defoe and Butler are striking instances. For the gratification of personal amusement, or the curious eye of the diligent antiquary, we might add a copious appendix of this sort, but such might not be so generally acceptable, as these occasional reflections illustrated by fewer examples.

The writers of the present century, this age of authors and books, will in all probability experience a very great diminution in the extent and character of their fame with the coming age. Countless volumes of fiction will soon be laid on the shelf for ever; whilst a class of writers, read by few and whose names have not yet gone abroad into general esteem, will, we venture to predict, become classical, not only or so much from the capacity of their genius, as from its direction to the permanently classical forms of writing. Except Scott (a vast deal of whose writing, it has been confessed by more than one even cautious critic, cannot last) what novelist will gain in fame, as the Critic and Essayist Hazlitt? We have had, for more than a century, no humorist like Lamb; and Hunt treads closely upon the heels of Steele. Many authors too will become famous in spite of their elaborate attempts at avoiding fame: the squib, the pamphlet, the newspaper editorial, will throw in the shade heavy Epics and dull histories; a picturesque sketch of manners, a fresh and spirited portrait of character, true and genial criticism, speculations on life and the principles and motives of human actions; these form the favorite reading of the best class of readers in all ages—and although the readers of Addison and Steele may, at the present day, comprise a small body, still they have admirers, and there are also readers and lovers of them who have succeeded them in the same form of composition. What style

Hosted by Google

or range of speculation does it not embrace? It is too didactic for the mass of readers, who, like children of ignorant people, must be entertained at the same time they are taught: but for the scholar and philosopher it is invaluable.

Myself a reader and writer of Essays, I must confess to a special fondness for the very name; and I have contracted a feeling of affectionate interest for the essayist and critic. As I run my eye over the shelves of my small collection, I find few books it rests upon with such pleasure as upon the essayists, moral painters and historians of manners and fashions. There are Bacon and Temple, and Cowley, with the admirable writers whose names are placed at the head of this paper. There too are Goldsmith and Shenstone and Mackenzie. Nor may I omit that trio of masterly essayists, Lamb and Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. Of the French, I especially cherish Rochefoucald and Labruyère—writers with more thinking in their maxims and sentences, than you find in whole pages of weaker writers. Among quite recent instances, Carlyle and Macaulay in England; Guizot and Cousin (though more scholastic than strictly belongs to general essayists) in France: and at home, Channing, Emerson and Dewey. Indeed, the bes twriting of the present day is to be found in periodical literature; though we have lost much in pure classicality and in certain traits of the essay, that have become merged in other forms of writing. Thus, owing to the necessity of rapid and copious productions, inaccuracies are not so rare as they should be; and evident marks of haste are to be found. The humorous painting of the Addisonian school has become the property of two or three capital novelists. We have now-a-days no pictures of manners, merely in essays; and since Hazlitt, no prose satirist of decided ability has arisen. The Lecturers and Reviewers occupy a large portion of the pro-

Hosted by Google

vince formerly allotted to the Essay. Moral speculation and criticism; analysis of character, historical painting, satirical description, the peculiar characteristics of the Essay, have, for the most part, passed into other forms. Yet a taste for this kind of writing is retained by a circle, which is rapidly widening, and in consequence the demand has evidently increased for more of literature, of the pleasantest kind—for something brief, pointed and pithy—with somewhat of a practical bearing, and yet which is to be considered as valuable in a purely literary estimate of the matter.

A kind of Literature is needed for the busy man and the gentleman, as well as for the recluse scholar; a tone of fresh vigor, real knowledge of life, wide and original experience is requisite. The authors of this must be men, scholars, and gentlemen. It is not by any means the most ambitious department of authorship, but, perhaps, next to fine poetry, it is the most stable; the staple is life and books: feeling and passion; without inclining to system or method, it is grave and philosophical: without descending to farce or burlesque, it admits of pleasantry and good-natured ridicule. It is not exact or mechanical science, but the *science of human nature* and the art of criticism (not of books and of authors only, but) of principles, and theories, and fashions, and contemporary manners. It is strictly historical, though it contains little narrative, for it points out the sources of historical truth. It is experimental philosophy, though without any settled rules of art. In brief, it is the kind of writing most particularly addressed to all, who, while they read, think and feel; and not to those who read to accumulate and display knowledge.

Addison and Steele have been more fortunate than most writers of essays, not only as they are among the best but

Hosted by Google

as they were among the earliest. Priority is, in fact, as important a thing in Literature, as precedence is thought to be in life. The first writers are generally the best; at all events they are the freshest and most original. In point of delicate humor, Addison is unsurpassed, though his serious writing, which is sometimes almost tame, has been equalled. Steele is more unique: such naturalness, so easy and uniform a style, a vein of sentiment so fresh and manly, such charming pleasantry, such elegance of compliment and heartiness at the same time, we find in no one other essayist. Not a few periodical writers might be mentioned, more brilliant, more ingenious, with greater learning and capacity, more profound, more exact, yet none who are so delightful as Steele is invariably. Happy on any topic, he is perfectly delicious where he is most at home, and writes from his heart. The greater fame of Addison has arisen in part from higher pretensions and as much from the serious nature of his moral essays. Addison, too, aimed more at being the censor; Steele was content with the reputation of sociality, and to be loved rather than be admired. Addison was perhaps a more cultivated man, but Steele had wit and spirit, that needed slight aids from scholarship—yet he would, at the present day, be called a scholar. Steele had less art and policy than his associate, was more open and credulous, a generous dupe, though deceived by no lack of sense, but of stratagem. Addison was author all over; Steele was more of the man than of the writer. Both were admirable in their respective manners. Addison's elegance and humor gave an additional beauty to the subjects fullest of it, naturally; while Steele's fine sense and airy style played with easy grace upon the most barren theme.

Besides the Spectator, Tattler and Guardian, Addison was

Hosted by Google

concerned in other periodical publications. He was not only the creator of Sir Roger de Coverly, the satirist of the beau monde, the elegant sermonizer, the tasteful critic; but also, the warm partizan and leading political writer. "*The Freeholder*" was a strong whig paper, edited and conducted by Addison, who furnished all the papers, under that title, which are collected into a single volume. It consists of fifty-five essays, and was commenced in the year '15, celebrated for the first rising in favor of the Pretender—and is filled with arguments in favor of the House of Hanover, the Protestant succession, and a number of elegant artifices (compliments garnished with eloquent flattery) to bring in the fair portion of the inhabitants of Great Britain to the side of the existing government. These papers are the best of the series. As a specimen of the work we make the following extracts from it, and which are in the Freeholder's happiest vein. They are transcribed from the fourth number, entitled, "Reasons why the British Ladies should side with the Freeholder:"—"It is with great satisfaction I observe that the women of our island, who are the most eminent for virtue and good sense, are in the interest of the present government. As the fair sex very much recommended the cause they are engaged in, it would be no small misfortune to a sovereign, though he had all the male part of a kingdom on his side, if he did not find himself king of the most beautiful half of his subjects. Ladies are always of great use to the party they espouse, and never fail to win over numbers to it.

"Lovers, according to Sir William Petty's computation, make at best the third part of the sensible men of the British nation; and it has been an uncontroverted maxim in all ages, that though a husband is sometimes a stubborn sort of a creature, a lover is always at the devotion of his mistress.

Hosted by Google

By this means it lies in the power of every fine woman to secure at least half a dozen able-bodied men to his majesty's service.The female world are likewise indispensably necessary in the best cause, to managethe controversial part of them, in which no man of tolerable breeding is ever able to refute them. Arguments out of a pretty mouth are unanswerable. There are many reasons why the women of Great Britain should be on the side of the Freeholder, and enemies to the person who would bring in arbitrary government and Popery. As there are several of our ladies who amuse themselves in the reading of travels, they cannot but take notice what uncomfortable lives those of their own sex lead where passive obedience is professed and practised in its utmost perfection. In those countries the men have no property but in their wives, who are the slaves to slaves; every married woman being subject to a domestic tyrant who requires from her the same vassalage that he pays to his sultan. If the ladies would seriously consider the evil consequences of arbitrary power, they would find that it spoils the shape of the foot in China, where the barbarous politics of the men so diminish the basis of the human figure, as to unqualify a woman for an evening walk or a country dance. In the East Indies, a widow who has any regard to her character, throws herself into the flames of her husband's funeral pile, to show, forsooth, that she is faithful and loyal to the memory of her deceased lord. In Persia, the daughters of Eve, as they call them, are reckoned in the inventory of their goods and chattels: and it is a usual thing when a man sells a bale of silk, or a drove of camels, to toss half a dozen women into the bargain. Through all the dominions of the great Turk, a woman thinks herself happy if she can but get the twelfth share of a husband, and is thought to be of no use in the

Hosted by Google

creation, but to keep up a proper number of slaves for the Commander of the Faithful. I need not set forth the ill-usage which the fair ones meet with in those despotic governments that lie nearer to us. Every one hath heard of the several ways of locking up women in Spain and Italy; where, if there is any power lodged in any of the sex, it is not among the young and the beautiful, whom nature seems to have formed for it, but among the old and withered matrons, known by the frightful names of Gouvernantes and Duennas. If any should allege the freedoms indulged to the French ladies, he must own that these are owing to the natural gallantry of the people, not to their form of government, which excludes by its very constitution every female from power, as naturally unfit to hold the sceptre of that kingdom. Women ought in reason to be no less averse to Popery than to arbitrary power. Some merry authors have pretended to demonstrate, that the Roman Catholic religion could never spread in a nation where women would have more modesty than to expose their inuocent liberties to a confessor. Others of the same turn have assured us that the fine British complexion, which is so peculiar to our ladies, would suffer very much from a fish diet; and that a whole Lent would give such a sallowness to the celebrated beauties of this island as would scarce make them distinguishable from those of France. I shall only leave to the serious consideration of my fair countrywomen, the danger any of them might have been in (had Popery been our national religion) of being forced by their relations to a state of perpetual virginity. The most blooming toast in the island might have been a nun; and many a lady who is now a mother of fine children, condemned to a condition of life disagreeable to herself, and unprofitable to the world. To this I might add the melancholy ob-

Hosted by Google

jects they would be daily entertained with, of several sightly men delivered over to an unavoidable celibacy. Let a young lady imagine to herself the brisk embroidered officer, who now makes love to her with so agreeable an air, converted into a monk; or the beau, who now addresses himself to her in a full-bottomed wig, distinguished by a little leather black scull-cap. I forbear to mention many other objections, which the ladies, who are no strangers to the doctrines of Popery, will easily recollect; though I do not in the least doubt but those I have already suggested will be sufficient to persuade my fair readers to be zealous in the Protestant cause." We read no such political writing at the present day; elegance of style is considered as quite a subordinate matter, and pleasantry rarely passes from a paragraph into an article.

The Lover, of Steele, is concerned with the policy of Passion, and the strategy of Love. It is a work of sentiment, and peculiarly a lady's journal. The passion of Love in all its multiplied forms; the affections of the heart with all their subtle windings; the various aspects of friendship are painted with masterly skill. Tales of real life, and characters so natural as to seem almost living, occupy a large space, with a rich fund of sense and unpretending sincerity of feeling. The purest sentiment, a facile wit, and polished gallantry, are its marked features. The Lover is an avowed imitation of the Tattler, which is a surety for the style of its author. Like that delightful collection, it contains its club, and had letters written to its author, Marmaduke Myrtle, gent. Thoroughly acquainted with city life, and the ways of the town, the book is full of good advice of the kind most needed in a great city. It is, besides this, a chart of the shoals and quicksands of the tender passion, that should be studied by all youthful navigators. Beyond this, it has the additional attraction of

Hosted by Google

delightful illustrative matter, incidental to the main design. It contains many admirable suggestions of the highest practical value, and delicate satire, with fine irony unequalled but in the pages of his friend and associate. Of these various fine qualities we shall endeavor to present examples, though necessarily brief and few. Here is the portrait of a *Lover Vagabond*, as he calls the representation of a certain class of speculative rakes. "He has the language, the air, the tender glance; he can hang upon a look, has most exactly the veneration of face when he is catched ogling one whose pardon he would beg for gazing; he has the exultation at leading off a lady to her coach; can let drop an indifferent thing, or call her servants with a loudness and a certain gay insolence rare enough; nay, he will hold her hand too fast for a man that leads her, and is indifferent to her, and yet come to that gripe with such slow degrees, that she cannot say he squeezed her hand, but for *anything further he had no inclination.*" We wish we could find room for certain delicious papers, that would be mutilated by mere extracts. Such are, the Battle of Eyes; the tragical history of Penruddock, with the affecting correspondence that passed between the husband and his wife; the story of the Venetian Count; the humorous family picture of the Crabtrees; the refined thoughts on making presents; the account of the Ladies of *consideration;* and of the young student who was so artfully taught to speak and act for himself; and a number of elegant episodes. Instead of these we can only copy a passage or so, at random—generally selecting such as Labruyère might have written, from their nicety and refinement; and maxims with regard to good breeding, as judicious as anything in Chesterfield, at the same time that they have ten-fold the heart in them.

Hosted by Google

"Women *dissemble* their passions better than men, but men *subdue* their passions better than women."

"There are no inclinations in women which more surprise me than their passions for chalk and china. The first of these maladies wears out in a little time; but when a woman is visited with the second, it generally takes possession of her for life. China vessels are playthings for women of all ages. An old lady of fourscore shall be as busy in cleaning an Indian Mandarin as her great-grand-daughter is in dressing her baby."

"A too great regard for doing what you are about with a good grace, destroys your capacity for doing it at all."

"The best way to do a thing as you ought, is to do it *only because* you ought."

"As for my own part, I always approve those who make the most of a little understanding, and carry that as far as they can, than those who will not condescend to be perfect, if I may so speak, in the *under* parts of their character."

"—— ugly is a woman's word for knavish."

"Some silly particle or other, as it were to tack the taking leave with the rest of the discourse, is a common error of young men of good education."

"A good judgment will not only supply, but go beyond experience; for the latter is only a knowledge that directs us in the dispatch of matters future, from the consideration of matters past of the same nature; but the former is a perpetual and equal direction in everything that can happen, and does not follow, but makes the precedent that guides the other."

The reader will do well to turn to the beautiful dedication to the Lover, a masterpiece of composition, as well as a noble effusion of friendship: the whole work is of the same texture,

Hosted by Google

and so uniformly attractive as to appear more to advantage read continuously than cut up into shreds and patches; a test to be applied only to works of standard merit, since most modern writers gain by transcribing their most elaborate passages.

II.

TYRONE POWER*

Is certainly the prince of Irish actors. Indeed we never saw the Irishman even decently personated before we saw this admirable performer, nor do we conceive it possible for any future rival to disturb our opinion of him. Irish Johnstone is with the past: he may have equalled Power, but we doubt it—we are sure he could not have surpassed him. Power, beyond any actor we ever saw, and we have seen the best that have graced the boards of our old Drury, unites in himself the most literal fidelity with the richest humor this side of burlesque. He is always natural; he is the most picturesque of actors. The elder Mathews had far finer wit, knowledge of character and invention; his son a more sparkling fancy, wonderful quickness, and a keener wit. Jack Reeve was John Bull in grotesque, and Keeley is nature's self in little. In quiet humor, the last mentioned actor beats them all. Dowton, whom we saw in his decline, was a serious old gentleman of the sentimental school. Charles Kemble was the perfection of the genteel comedian. All of these performers were gifted with a universality to which Power

* 1840.

Hosted by Google

can lay no claim, and yet we reiterate, in his single walk of Irishman, whether gentle or simple, the attorney or the tailor, the country gentleman or the rustic, the ambassador or the valet, he is the finest, most natural, most attractive actor the stage now possesses.

When we first sat down to sketch the character of Power's acting, we thought to compare him with Keeley; a close analysis gives Power the palm. We say this with a genuine relish of the delicious quaintness and grave humor of Peter Spyk and Euclid Facile: both actors are men of excellent sense but their humor and fancy are different. Powers is a Rubens in his rich colors, and Keeley a Teniers in his scrupulous exactness. Keeley is a Flemish painter among actors; cautious, thorough, elaborate. The effect of his acting proves this, though it may not be discovered while he is acting; he leaves a clear, fixed impression on the mind. This Power does not aim to create, or cannot; he is more the actor of impulse, not without study. He has too much nicety and neatness for that: what we mean is, there is more of a riant spirit, an overflow of soul in his acting than in Keeley's, which might almost tempt one to say he was a careless actor. Keeley, on the contrary, is the most careful of actors, and gradually unfolds a character; Power displays it in the first scene. Both are admirable characters, with quite opposite temperaments; and the most we can say is, that the breadth of Power's humor is of a more sympathetic nature than the depth of Keeley's.

An undoubted proof of the genius of Power, for such he certainly possesses, is his constant freshness. Acting in a single line, one might regard him as liable to monotony, and that line comprehending but two ranges of character, diversify them as you will. New incidents, a new story, new charac-

Hosted by Google

ters may come in, but in every varying light, you can find either the Irish gentleman, or the Irish peasant; most delicately shaded, most nicely discriminated, yet only these two. It has been disputed whether Power can *act* the Irish gentleman; there is no doubt he is one. It is said, he carries into a genteel character the farcical conceits and low cunning that distinguished his Rory O'More, his Irish Lion, Teddy the Tiler, Looney M'Twoolter, and Dr. O'Toole. We wish such critics to go and see his Irish Attorney. If that be not a portrait of the Irish gentleman of a past date, a harum-scarum rattlepate, but a genuine, humane-hearted gentleman withal, a man of sense to boot, then we know not what such a character should be. When Power chooses, he can assume the port and bearing of a finished gentleman. In this last mentioned character, he is the exact picture of a country gentleman, who has lived much among his inferiors, and caught something of their slang and style. His Irish Ambassador is not so good. In O'Callaghan again we see the gentleman plainly, though clad in a rusty suit and worn beaver. His Sir Lucius O'Trigger we never saw; but the Park company could not sustain such a comedy as the Rivals. Where would be the Acres, Sir Anthony, the Captain Absolute, the Lydia Languish? To be sure we would have the best of Mrs. Malaprops, in Mrs. Wheatley. We would have a judicious actor in Mr. Chippendale, whatever part he assumed; and a tolerable one in Placide, whose powers have been overstated. But we want Charles Kemble, Jack Reeve, Farren, and Mrs. Jordan, or Miss Chester, or Miss Kelly, if the play were to be cast as it deserved.

Excellent as is Mr. Power's Irish gentleman, his peasant must be confessed beyond all praise: it is perfection. In the White Horse of the Peppers, he leaves for a time his original

Hosted by Google

character, which is that of an Irish cavalier, and assumes that of a bog-trotter. The vast difference is seen at once. If he were good in the first, and such he certainly was, he was excellent in the last.

Another proof of Mr. Power's merit is, that *he is the piece.* In all the plays he performs, his character is not only the main character, but the only character of importance; and yet he so fills up the stage and the play, that he makes poor actors play well in his company. Other stars shine by themselves alone; Power shines in his own person, and through the rest of the company by a reflected light. In a word, Power is the herald of mirth and good humor wherever he comes; we greet his honest face with joy on the stage, or in the street, and cannot help regarding him as a much greater and better friend to humanity than a score of professed moralizers who never touch the heart.

III.

A FEW HOMERIC NODS IN MR. HALLAM.

Histories of literature in general prove very unsatisfactory. The ground they cover is too wide; the topics discussed too multifarious; the space for each very limited. There is more of the narrative talent employed in them generally than critical acumen. A historical line of writers is deduced, and the genealogy of the various schools of literature and the mutations of taste and fashion are presented; but the individual traits of single writers, unless those of the first class, are too often overlooked, and the rare merits of minor writings, which

Hosted by Google

are in less regard because less known, cast almost entirely in the shade, or else unfaithfully noticed. This general fault applies to the three most prominent histories of literature with which the modern scholar is acquainted—the works of Schlegel, Sismondi and Bouterwek. The late Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by Mr. Hallam, is open to the same objections, and, if we are not greatly mistaken, to a wider and more prejudicial extent.

The capacity and requisite attainments on the part of a historian of European letters, would, if rigorously tested in the person of Mr. Hallam, incline one to place his pretensions and to rate his performance rather lower than the press and the reading public generally have thought proper to ascribe to him. The true position of this author in the literary republic, has been well defined by Macaulay, as that of a liberal, fair and accurate historian. But it will be readily seen that the very qualities that best fit Hallam for this department, are the least appropriate to him in his new character. The cool decisions and rigidly impartial statements of the narrator of civil and military occurrences, and of the speculatist on the political aspects of states and nations, diminish the influence of a literary spirit cherished with enthusiasm and kept fresh by a natural and healthy sympathy with men of genius. Hence we find the statesman and political economist has here got the better of the literary critic and the genuine man of letters. Mr. Hallam is a man of varied acquirements, much industry, and a correct judgment on points where he is well versed; but his work is, after all, little better than a *catalogue raisonné;* and in that section of it most interesting to the English reader—the department of old English prose and poetry—lamentably deficient, not only in a just appreciation

Hosted by Google

of the glories of the reigns of Elizabeth, of James, and of Charles I., but also in some of the common details with which every gentleman of moderate reading is supposed to be acquainted. All questions of speculative theology and theoretical politics, the antiquarian history of the first editions of the classics, and the early translations of the Bible, the progress of Oriental learning, and similar heads, are well and learnedly handled. The great defect of the writer is seen when he comes to speak of the minor prose literature of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and where those recondite niceties and delicate traits that test the fine critic, pass either without observation or are ignorantly and almost insolently treated. A feeling of the beauties of an obscure author of merit is as rare in the world of books, as the honest appreciation of a worthy man, who lives out of the world, and is, perhaps, underrated by the few to whom he is known, as in the circles of society. Not only candor but also ingenuity is wanted, in a critic of this description. The critic has candor, but is by no means an ingenious man in any of his works, and, we apprehend, not so well informed on these very topics as he ought to be. On this latter suggestion alone can we account for several false reports and very inadequate decisions. We have marked many instances, but shall at present quote but a few.

Mr. Hallam writes thus of Jeremy Taylor: "His sentences are of endless length, and hence *not only altogether unmusical*, but not always reducible to grammar." Of Donne and Cowley, he gives the old Johnsonian criticism, which has been amply refuted over and over again. He speaks of South as he is currently mentioned, merely a witty court preacher, and says not a word of his vigorous eloquence. Of Hammond's biblical annotations he treats at length, but adds

Hosted by Google

not a syllable of the sermons of the English Fenelon. Of Marvel, says Hallam,—"His satires are *gross and stupid ;*" (!) while the critic writes this sentence of Crashaw, "It is difficult in general to find anything in Crashaw that bad taste has not deformed" (!!) Among the Shaksperian commentators he mentions Mrs. Montague, and others inferior even to her, but omits altogether any reference to Hazlitt or Lamb. One of the most flagrant instances of a want of proper reverence for the finest writers of the finest period of English literature, is to be seen in his notice of the Mermaid tavern : "the oldest and not the worst of clubs." The circle in which Mr. Hallam moves in perhaps more courtly and aristocratical. His idol, Mr. Hookham Frere, possesses "admirable humor ;" but poor Owen Feltham, forsooth, who wrote the first century of his Resolves at the age of eighteen, and lived the life of a dependant, is a harsh and quaint writer, full of sententious commonplaces. This young man offers a striking example of an early maturity of judgment, and of the union of genuine pathos and fanciful humor. His little volume will be read with gratification a century hence, and by a larger class than now peruse it, and we dare affirm with more pleasure than the long and inaccurate volumes of Hallam.

Mr. Hallam's judgments, often assuredly caught from second sources, are, when original, those of a critic with the taste of Dr. Blair ; a strange union of French criticism and reverence for classic models current in the early part and until almost the close of the last century. He gives an opinion of Addison, to which no reader of varied acquisition, or of broad views of the present day, could by any possibility assent. After Lamb and Hazlitt's admirable criticisms, we cannot read with patience the labored cautiousness of Mr Hallam, on the old English dramatists. Our author's notices

Hosted by Google

of the old divines are too much a history of their polemical works, and the views of their pulpit eloquence either borrowed or else confused.

Lest the popular admiration for genius of the popular sort should run wild, he sneeringly alludes to a certain class of critics, who would erect the John Bunyans and Daniel Defoes into the gods of their idolatry. The historian would himself peradventure substitute Dr. Lingard and Sharon Turner, his brother historians, or a pair of biblical critics, or High Dutch commentators. There are critics who measure an author's works by the company he keeps, or the clothes he wears. We suspect Mr. Hallam to be one of those who would treat Sir Harris Nicholas or the head of a college with unfeigned respect, but not allow himself to be ensnared into the *vulgar* society at Lamb's Wednesday-evening parties, where Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Godwin, Hunt, and a host of the most brilliant men of the age, met to converse freely, like men, and not like litterateurs or namby-pamby followers of noble lords.

The history of English literature alone is much too comprehensive a subject for any one man. Mr. D'Israeli, who advertised his intention of attempting it, has been wisely disappointed. The curiosities of literature he has a more real love of, than for the simple beauties of prose or poetry. He might have compiled merely a collection of rare facts and curious fragments, valuable for their suggestive matter to the student, but quite inadequate for a philosophical history of literature. The best criticisms are contained in classic lives, in letters, and the ablest review articles, in the lectures of Hazlitt, and the essays of Lamb and Leigh Hunt. With these writers, Mr. Hallam may in nowise compete, and we trust he will follow the bent of his natural inclinations, in turning over state

Hosted by Google

papers and government documents, and display his peculiar ability in sifting the measures of a party, and following up the consequences of a bill or a statute. For literary criticism, his cold temperament and negative taste are ill adapted. They incline him to look on the frank relation of an author's feelings as offensive egotism, and wholly obscure his perception of characteristic individuality or marked personal traits.

IV.

RELIGIOUS NOVELS.

A CERTAIN class of prose fictions is included under the above general term, which, from Bunyan to Brownson, is and ever has been exceedingly popular. They are, for this reason, to be closely scrutinized, as their scope and tendency may prove productive either of great good or considerable injury, not only to the cause or literature, but even to the cause of vital religion and Christian morality. The phrase, "Religious Novels," comprehends equally those works written professedly to favor or satirize particular sects and creeds, and those works which, with a more general and popular interest, still aim to take a high stand on all questions of morality, and to be, in effect, text-books of ethics and casuistry.

A general objection that strikes one at once, on the very face of the matter, is with regard to the intention and spirit of these and similar productions. Is a novel, we would ask, the proper vehicle for religious sentiment and moral instruction?

Hosted by Google

We would not be misunderstood. We sincerely believe that every good book, even of the lightest character, should carry its moral with it, and that a good moral. What we doubt is, whether the morality of the book should be made offensively prominent,—should stand foremost, casting all its other merits into the background, or whether it should not lie covert and unpretendingly under a cheerful face of humble docility Pope has wisely advised us that

> "Men should be taught as if we taught them not;
> And things *unknown*, as things *forgot*."

The skilful man of the world—the Sir Politic Would-be of this generation,—always *reminds* and never *informs* directly. "The agreeable man is he who agrees." So the judicious moralist, if at the same time a writer of fiction, conceals his moral under a veil of fancy's weaving, and impresses a solemn truth on our hearts, whilst he is delighting the imagination or instructing the reason. This palpable error of overdoing the matter, being "too moral by half" (always smacking of hypocrisy), has been remarked by the ablest critical and æthetical philosophers; but it is a vulgar error of such frequent occurrence as to call for as frequent animadversion. It is not necessary that every book should contain a confession of faith, nor comprehend a code of religious precepts. Every biography is not of a good man; some histories must relate the successes of bad men and evil principles. Novels, of all books, are permitted to be least didactic and hortatory (to employ a Johnsonian phrase). We hate misnomers. A book of devotion, a tract of conversial divinity, a sermon, a moral essay, are all well in their proper place; but a book professing to be a novel, but which is, in fact, a sham novel, a mere cover for the introduction of a work of another class, under its

Hosted by Google

name, is a forgery, a falsehood, a contemptible piece of deception. The title may be assumed to gain a wider circle of readers (it may be a fetch of the author's, or a trick of the publisher's), but that affords no just excuse for falsifying its character by giving it a name that means something directly the reverse. Lord Peter, in the Tale of the Tub, endeavored to make a loaf of bread to stand for "fish, flesh and fowl," but such is now a stale cheat. It is for bread, giving a stone, in the language of Scripture. It is virtually telling a falsehood. No honest man could countenance such an imposition, evidently a piece of Jesuitical policy. The defender of the practice would argue, probably, the purity of his intention and the goodness of the end to be reached: for "a verse may take him whom a sermon flies;" shielding himself under these batteries from the charge of employing unfair means.

We have a word more to say on this head. We urge, a novel is not, as a matter of course, to be a moral treatise or ecclesiastical horn-book (all good works of fiction presuppose the essentials of religion and the reality of virtue); but,—and here we join with the strictest religionists,—if it pretend directly to *teach* morals or religion at all, it must teach pure doctrine and sound ethics. It is essential, primarily, that it be consistent with itself and faithful to nature. Let an exact picture of life, and manners, and character be presented, without any formal comment or prefatory analysis; give character, and feeling, and principle fair play; let opposites contend, and then good will be apparent, evil be manifest. Allurements will be offered to virtue, and vice be her own corrector. No danger need be apprehended from too close fidelity of description, for in that case the evil will correct itself. Grossness is repulsive enough; it is the elegant voluptuousness of

Hosted by Google

polished vice that is so baleful and pernicious. By all means to be avoided is the hateful paradox of painting good infidels, or cold skeptics with all the virtues of humanity. And some who pass for mere skeptics, have a natural religion and a pious benevolence in their hearts, which they do not dream of, and do not profess. Such was "the good David" (Hume), the friend and almost the idol of Adam Smith, and Macintosh, and Mackenzie.

We have mentioned two classes of religious novels. Under the first denomination would fall Bunyan's Pilgrim and Holy War, Patrick's Imitation (taken by Gray as a standard of dullness), the Spiritual Quixote, Walker's Vagabond, Cœlebs in search of a Wife, and later fictions of a somewhat similar character by De Wette and Brownson. These are but a few. Of the second description are the novels of Defoe, Richardson, Dr. Moore, Johnson's Rasselas, and a vast collection of moral tales, by Marmontel, and Cottin, and De Genlis, and Chateaubriand, and St. Pierre, with a thousand others.

A striking defect is common to the above works, and the religious biographies,—the heroes are made perfect; they are morally and intellectually accomplished, and unite the piety of the saint to the polish of the gentleman. They are literally "just men, that need no repentance." Instead of being represented as human and fallible, they are painted as so pure and immaculate as to preclude us from sympathy with weakness or failure, and leave nothing for the mind but stupid admiration. We are called by the creators of these models of superhuman excellence to fall down and do homage to the idols of their fancy, the gods of their idolatry, as to our liege exemplars. The characters themselves, by their monotony of merit, into which no particle of folly is allowed to intrude, are made tiresome and unnatural. They are flattered into the

Hosted by Google

most disgusting form of vanity—spiritual conceit. They are moral and religious coxcombs. "It is the man, Sir Charles Grandison," is the constant exclamation of praise. The morality of these novels is *moral pedantry*. It is as different from true moral wisdom as genuine learning is different from the pedantry of books and colleges. The morality of ethical novels is generally a *conventional mannerism:* the pretensions to piety savor of Puritanical assumption. The religious conversations are often blasphemous, from their absurd and presumptuous familiarity. We read a sort of RELIGIOUS SLANG, too often found even in the pulpit; by which we intent to express, a stereotyped repetition of phrases, employed without any definite meaning, and in an indifferent, careless spirit. The most serious Christian cannot avoid allowing the existence of cant, which is more injurious in religion than anywhere else. In religious novels, any expression of this kind exposes the work to the sneers of wicked men, as well as to the intelligent censure of the critic, who is no scoffer.

One description of religious novels, that might be better styled moral satires, if not carried out into burlesque or disfigured by liberality, may be the vehicle of sound argument and pointed rebuke. The Vagabond, by Walker, is a book of this nature. Such, also, we conceive the Spiritual Quixote to be; a satire directed against the Methodists and their extravagances.

Bunyan, the first of religious writers, was an allegorical painter with little of the satirist. He has nothing in common, as a mere writer, with later writers of religious fiction, —Hannah More, for instance. Pilgrim's Progress is dramatic and spiritual; Cœlebs is a tract on the art of selecting a wife, transformed into the shape, the figure "extern," of a novel. Bunyan gives us pictures; Hannah More furnishes

Hosted by Google

us with sermons and moral dissertations. Bunyan is a poet; Mrs. More is a *proser*. Hannah More's true field—and there she was admirable—(for, in spite of many drawbacks, she had great talent), was, prose fiction in the shape of moral tracts (good Sunday reading) for the plainer class of people, and which would impress many wholesome truths on readers of all classes. She was also a good writer for children beyond infancy and on the confines of boyhood or girlhood. She wanted genius to open the minds and address the fancy of very young children; and she wanted breadth and originality for maturer men and women of education and experience.

We come, finally, to this conclusion, with regard to the morality of the novel as *a work of art;* and we find our idea so justly and distinctly enunciated by Hazlitt,* that we borrow his language: "The most moral writers, after all, are those who do not pretend to inculcate any moral. The professed moralist unavoidably degenerates into the partizan of a system; and the philosopher is too apt to warp the evidence to his own purpose. But the painter of manners gives the facts of human nature, and leaves us to draw the inference; if we are not able to do this, or do it ill, at least it is our own fault." In the same way, a philosophic historian will prefer the transcript from contemporary records to any fine-spun dissertations of his own; and an effective orator will allow a clear and spirited statement of facts to do the work of a labored declamation.

There have been warm discussions on this point, to wit, whether every work of art should have a direct moral? Goethe and his disciples contended that it should not; that, questionless, a deep lesson was to be learnt, not appearing, however, on the surface of the work, but to be educed and

* Lectures on the Comic Writers.

Hosted by Google

evolved after study and earnest meditation. Coleridge boasted that a principal beauty of his "Ancient Mariner" consisted in its being without an avowed moral, at which good Mistress Barbauld was mightily shocked. Not having a formal mora, did not impair the essential morality of the poem. This speech of the poet was analogous to his praise of Shakspeare's women, that they were *characterless;* recipients of virtue, and reflectors of it, but not stiff, moral, heartless prudes. The great poet detested pretence, and most of all moral pretences. He saw a great and deep truth, which the mass can never comprehend, or, if they did, could not appreciate, and which must ever remain a dark problem to many well-meaning and well-taught (in other respects), but pragmatical persons. For a man can only see with what eyes he has, and with none other. Optical aids furnish optical delusions; and thus truth is perverted, because the percipient wants a true vision.

The novel is a classic form of composition; it has proved the vehicle of consummate knowledge of life and character; it comprehends and includes exquisite descriptions of nature, and beauty, and comic traits, and pathetic situations; it paints the manners, and developes the sentiments. It is familiar history and popular philosophy; but we apprehend it is not the proper form of writing to be selected for the propagation of religious opinions, or the instilling, in a didactic manner, of moral sentiments. We would be very far from excluding either; but we maintain that they should be subsidiary rather than glaring; incidental not prominent. Palpable display only invites attack, and stimulates rude jests.

With all the love in the world for good literature, and none the less for novels of the good old stamp, as a portion of literature, we yet confess religion is too holy a thing to be bandied about in lively dialogue, or defended with the

Hosted by Google

supercilious condescension of arrogant eloquence. Other forms of composition are better adapted to impress moral precepts, or warm by pure devotion, or excite by passionate appeals, or enlighten by the inductions of reason. The divine music of sacred poesy is reviving from the lethargy in which she lay buried for the greater part of the eighteenth century. The rich strains of the minor religious poets of the seventeenth century are now reproduced, and rising from a new choir of contemporary bards. The songs of Zion fascinate the sense, while they purify the heart. The well of life requires no such filtering as the poisoned fountain of Helicon, to drink only of the pure essence of poesy. The pulpit is more especially the source whence should flow invigorating streams of the water of the River of Life, to cheer and fortify the soul. That these ends are not in all cases so answered, is a crying evil. The history of good men, who have actually lived and struggled with temptation and fortune, if truly and dramatically related, should at least equal a fictitious narrative of the ideal good man. The history of the church is a history of human nature, and full of rich instruction. For direct precept or discussion, the moral essay, the review, the religious periodical, are always open. And it is indeed matter of especial wonder how, with the rich theological literature of England, any poverty should be felt of religious reading for the most fastidious scholar; or the necessity of resort to novels for doctrinal or practical instruction. Perhaps the best thing to be done, is, with all humility and respect for the great names and greater minds of the elder English writers, to point out the several excellences of each, and thereby persuade to a study and contemplation of them. This we have always honestly endeavored to do, however feeble or imperfect may have been the execution of our purpose.

Hosted by Google

V.

LITERARY AMBASSADORS.*

THE recent appointment of two of the most elegant-minded men our country has yet produced, as foreign ministers to two of the most powerful courts of the old world, has led us to the consideration of the many great authors, sometimes poets, who have heretofore graced the same honorable office, and thence our subject has carried us into incidental reflections on the connection subsisting between politics and literature. Our country, we may remark in passing, is not only *safe*, as certain cautious writers observe, in such hands as those of the accomplished Everett and the tasteful Irving, but it is even highly honored by such representations. Since her earliest connection with us, England has never given us so fair a specimen of her race as we now present her with; except perhaps when the amiable enthusiast, the eloquent Bishop of Cloyne, visited our shores. And Spain, since the days of Cervantes, has been unable to exchange with us the equal of Washington Irving. Our two great countrymen may compare in literary merit and social worth with the lettered statesmen of an earlier age in England's literary history, and are, with the Sidneys, the Wottons, the Herberts, of a purer epoch.

From the earliest dawn of civilisation, the ruler has been, in the noblest instances, always something more than a mere ruler. He has been often a priest; frequently, an orator; and sometimes a poet. Moses, and David, and Solomon, among the Jews—Pericles was an orator and a critic: Demosthenes, a great orator: Cicero, a moralist and rhetorician:

* 1842.

Hosted by Google

Cæsar, a general, an author, an orator, and indeed an universal genius. But to confine ourselves to great Englishmen alone, and to those of that nation employed in embassies,—Dan Chaucer, the morning star of English poetry, was sent abroad on a political errand, and passed the greater part of his life at the courts of Edward III. and Richard II. In the time of Henry VIII. we meet the names of the courtly Surrey, the poet and lover, as well as the knight and courtier, and the all-accomplished Lord Herbert (elder brother to George Herbert). Spenser was, if we are not mistaken, entrusted with a commission of statistical survey, or something of the sort, which led to his work on Ireland. All the great prose writers and poets of Elizabeth's time took a deep interest in policy, except the dramatists. At home, Bacon, and Burleigh, and Selden, and Hooker, and Coke: "abroad, in arms," Sidney and Raleigh (twin brothers in genius and glory), and those gay rivals for the favor of the maiden queen, Essex and Leicester. The great dramatists seem to have been too deeply and too delightfully engrossed in creating fair visions of their own, to trouble their heads much with the concerns of this sublunary planet.

The reigns of the first two Stuarts were highly favorable to letters, both in church and state. Then were the high loyalist divines well rewarded for their learned devotion and eloquent zeal. Then arose that galaxy of brilliant names, Taylor, and South, and Barrow, and Donne; and that rare class who combined the elegant scholar, the high churchman, the accurate man of business, the high-toned royalist, and the fine gentleman, in a proportion and degree we have seldom seen since. Of this class was Sir Henry Wotton, who was sent abroad on three several missions of an important nature, and finally ended his days as provost of Eton college.

Hosted by Google

His name is embalmed for ever in the epitaph of Cowley, and his fame perpetuated in the artless gossip of Izaac Walton. Howell, the letter-writer, was employed in the same way. So, too, was Dr. Donne, who went to France as secretary to his noble patron; Cowley filled a similar station; and Quarles, who at one period was cup-bearer to the famous and beautiful queen of Bohemia. The list of great names might be much lengthened by reference to books; but we are quoting from memory.

During the commonwealth the claims of literature were by no means overlooked. The parliamentary leaders were men of education, as well as of great natural abilities; Pym, Hampden, and Sir Harry Vane. The sagacious Protector himself selected the best men for his own service. The greatest poet of all time was the private secretary of Cromwell, and his assistant Marvell was a true patriot and man of fine genius. Howe and Owen, the two greatest divines of that day, were the Protector's chaplains. The former of these Robert Hall pronounced to be superior to all the divines he had ever read, and to have given him more just ideas on theological subjects. The latter was the champion of the Independents, and is still regarded by his sect as a Hercules in controversial theology.

On the restoration of Charles II., those divines, and lawyers and scholars, who had given their support to his cause by their passive sufferings, as well as by their active exertions with tongue or pen, were in general amply rewarded. The noble historian of the great rebellion was created Lord Chancellor. The imprisoned divines were restored to their pulpits. Defenders of the faith and adherents of the king suddenly rose from the condition of country curates to the offices of bishop and archbishop: court poets were ennobled, and wits were in the ascendant.

Hosted by Google

But at the revolution arose another change; the whigs then came into power, and whig writers were favored accordingly. Addison and Steele were favorites with their party from their political tracts, as they were with the public from their wit, and humor, and style, and knowledge of life. Garth, the favorite whig physician, was also a popular poet. The same claim gave reputation even to the prosy blockhead, Blackmore; and both were knighted for their loyalty. The English La Fontaine (with greater licentiousness), Prior, was sent to France. Newton was made master of the mint, and the rest were well provided for. The great tory writers were continually depressed, and gained no favor from the public save that which their brilliant poems extorted. Among these were Pope; Swift, who never got beyond his deanship, because he could not stoop for a bishopric; the amiable humorist, Arbuthnot; the charming Gay; the pensive Parnell. Two tory leaders, Bolingbroke and Atterbury, were even driven into exile, from which the latter never returned.

Coming down to our own time, we may observe the close alliance between politics and law, and politics and literature. The great public characters of the state, of this century, have been for the most part originally lawyers: the Cannings, and Peels, and Broughams of England, and the Adamses, the Pinckneys, and the Websters of America. Of letters, the chiefs too, the Scotts, and Wordsworths, the Coleridges, and Carlyles, the Hazlitts, and the Macauleys, have taken a deep interest in the issue of certain political questions, too often mere party questions. In many cases, the leaders in literature have held prominent offices in some one of the departments of government. The connection of poetry with politics is not hard to make out. The ardor of devotion,

Hosted by Google

whether to a king or to a great abstract principle of right, in either case exerts a most important effect upon the imagination. Where power is embodied and personified, as in a kingly government, more outward pomp is exhibited, but less by far of a high moral elevation of sentiment, than is seen in the severe beauty and stern dignity of republicanism. Cato is a nobler character for the mind to dwell upon than Charles of England; and George Washington is a greater name than Frederick or Catherine.

A natural alliance is also easily formed between high churchmanship and royalty, and that poetry which is captivated by the splendor of both; and yet the finest description of cathedral music has come from the pen of a puritan poet (vide Il Penseroso): and the most eloquent passage on the French revolution from the tory poet Wordsworth.

The common objection, that literary pursuits incapacitate a man for business, has been long since refuted by Bacon and a host of writers down to the time of Addison. The accuracy and nicety that certain studies impart fit one admirably for the employments of legislation and diplomacy. The invariably good effects of meditation and study on mental discipline, and the growth of the intellectual powers, are also discernible in every human employment, and can unfit a man for nothing. Poets alone, it may be conceded, if not originally gifted with a robust moral constitution, may easily allow an effeminate sense of beauty to obscure their sense of rugged truths. The greatest poets, however, Dante and Milton, have been the firmest political philosophers and patriots. The Moores and Cornwalls of the time, might easily sink and faint beneath the heat and burden of the day. In our own country, Bryant and Dana would fight to the last for the principles of justice and liberty: our butterfly versi-

Hosted by Google

fiers only would become intimidated by the frown, and quail beneath the glances of power. American authors of the first rank are, without exception, warm advocates of the principles of a pure democracy, untainted by any mixture of radicalism. There are Bancroft, the first historian; Channing, the finest moral essayist, and Hawthorne, the most original prose-poet, not only of our day, and of American literature, but of our age, and of English literature. These are all devoted to the cause of truth, liberty, justice, and public, as well as private, honor.

Generally the selection of an ambassador at a foreign court is a matter left to mere hireling politicians, or determined on insufficient or impartial grounds. But the representative of a great nation should be a great man. Ingenuity is not so much wanted as innate tact directing solid wisdom. A gentleman is to be preferred before what is commonly called a genius. Where there are many ceremonials, less talent is wanted. Occasions arise, nevertheless, where profound sagacity is needed, and where the weight of character is invaluable. Still, where elegance of mind and of manners may both be found united; where a talent for negotiation and public business is farther set off by a brilliant elocution, with a fund of intellectual resources and personal accomplishments,—there, we have finished public character, and such we conceive to be no more than a just sketch of our minister to England. Mr. Irving, we suspect, is less of a man of business, but he has other claims to prefer. He is the historian of Columbus: he has charmed thousands by his romantic tales and picturesque descriptions of Spain. His state duties will be in all probability much less arduous than those of his illustrious compeer, and consequently demand less of the diplomatic talent.

We conclude then, as we began, by congratulating our

Hosted by Google

countrymen on the possession of such representations abroad: men to be honored and reverenced now, and to be known as classical writers and elegant gentlemen, to all future ages.

VI.

THE PROSE STYLE OF POETS.

HAZLITT'S view is, that poets write bad prose for a variety of reasons, which we will consider in order. In the course of his essay, (on the same subject, and bearing the same title,) he lays down certain positions that we cannot regard as tenable, and shall consequently attempt to show their unsoundness. The paper was probably written to attract attention rather than to decide the dogma; it is brilliant and half true, but only *half* true. It contains some very fine special pleading, and certainly many valuable hints; but it is written to suit a theory, in defiance of facts, and from too narrow a generalization. We shall try to avoid doing injustice (even while advocating the opposite side) to the real merits of the essay; to dwell upon the beauty, acuteness and eloquence of which, might alone occupy the space of a separate criticism.

The principal arguments our critic employs to confirm his decision are these: Poets, in writing prose (strange as it seems), display a want of *cadence*, have no principle of modulation in the musical construction of their periods; but missing rhyme or blank verse, the regular accompaniment to which their words are to be said or sung, fall into a slovenly manner, devoid of art or melody. The prose works of

Hosted by Google

Sydney, Milton, Cowley, Dryden, Goldsmith and Dana, afford instances sufficient to disprove this assertion. At the same time it must be confessed, that rhyme has helped out many a bold thought and expanded (by rhetorical skill) many a half formed idea. It is no less true that certain eminent poets have as assuredly failed in attaining a first rate prose style, as certain capital prose writers have failed in writing even tolerable verse. We agree with Hazlitt, that Byron's prose is bad, inasmuch as he aims to make it too effective; trying to knock down and stun an antagonist with the latter end of a sentence, as with the butt-end of a coach whip. Coleridge's prose, too, is not inaptly compared to the cast-off finery of a lady's wardrobe. The poet's prose muse being a sort of hand-maiden to his poetical (and true) mistress, and tricked out in the worn out trappings of the latter, and ornaments at second hand. The Ancient Mariner, Love, the sonnets, tragedies, and occasional poetry of this author, are master-pieces: but his Watchman and Conciones ad Populum have been honestly censured as mere trash.

Hazlitt is very caustic in his remarks on poetical prose, and with great justice. It is the weakest of all sorts of prose; we prefer to it the very baldest expression, so it is only precise and clear. And so far from manifesting richness of fancy or imagination, it is proof only of a good memory and a liberally stocked wardrobe of metaphorical commonplaces. It is the style of most sentimental writers, of the majority of orators, of fashionable preachers, and mystical philosophers. It is not the style of a manly thinker, of a man who has anything to say, or of a man of genius. No great orator or logician employs it; we find it in no popular manuals of philosophy or politics. It is never used by a good historian or a great novelist, nor indeed by any one who can write anything else.

Hosted by Google

The critic gives a further reason for the bad prose style of the poets. He says, the same liberty of inversion is not to be allowed in prose that prevails in poetry: that there is more restraint and severity in prose composition. Yet what can be more rigorous than the laws of verse; what style so compressed and close, yet so pithy and "matter-full," as the style of the finest poets? Truth, adds the author of Table-Talk, is the essential object of the prose-man (we suspect he meant the philosopher, from the authorities that follow): but beauty is the supreme intent of the poet. At the present day, have we not learnt a better lesson than this, after the teaching of centuries? Is not the poet the moralist and "right popular philosopher?" Do we not learn the truest and deepest metaphysics (so far as we can learn that internal and individual science from books) from the best poets: do we not obtain our highest ethical maxims and our truest æsthetical views from the same sources? Doth not the poet impress our hearts and arouse our inmost sympathies, with a skill far superior to that of the priest or seraphic doctor? But we need not dilate upon that head, nor repeat in plain terms, the comprehensive and philosophical picture of the true poet, drawn by one (Sidney) of the greatest and most eloquent of the craft, in the rich and glowing colors of fancy.

Hazlitt has very strangely fallen into the obsolete doctrines of Johnson and the Anglo-Gallic school of criticism (the English pupils of Dubos, Bossu and Bouhours); that pleasure is the highest aim of the poet: that his noblest powers tend only to amuse or recreate. This is true of the minor and lighter poets, but not of poets of the first class. It holds with regard to Swift and Prior, not to Milton or Wordsworth. It refers more correctly to purely fanciful poets, than grandly imaginative writers. To restrict our-

Hosted by Google

selves to a single nation—the Hebrews. Is David, or Job, or Solomon, a "pretty" poet: do their writings furnish merely entertainment? Are they not rather profoundly instructive, as well as sublime and impassioned? Is Homer, or Dante, a trifler: or are we to estimate Shakspeare and Æschylus as ordinary playwrights? Every critical tyro knows better. But our critic reduces the question to one of metaphysical morality. He says, in part truly, as others have written before him, that fortitude is not the characteristical virtue of poets. This, too, is a hasty assertion: it is not the virtue of the majority of the poets, nor of the mass of mankind, but it is a distinguishing trait of the largest souls. If Milton and Dante, Johnson and Scott, possessed not this noble virtue, there were none ever did. And look at the manly resolution of Burns, of Elliott, of Bryant, of Dana, of Cowper, and of Wordsworth. If these are not teachers of long suffering and patient endurance, we know not where such are to be found.

From the want of sufficient self command, reasons Hazlitt the poets have been unable to conquer a sense of beauty, by which they were fascinated and had become enslaved. Nor need they to conquer it, save when opposed to truth, a higher and rarer form of intellectual beauty. Truth is more beautiful than what we ordinarily style beauty, or rather the highest truth is beauty itself in the abstract. Sensual beauty is truth materialized, and derives its charms from the union of proportion, fitness, utility, and an innate harmony—what Hazlitt meant is, that poets too much regard ornament, and fall in love with their own figurative fancies, worshipping the idols they have set up in their own imaginations, of their own creation, like the heathen of old. They seem to mistake fiction for fact, and rather dally with fancy than are filled

Hosted by Google

with faith. They accumulate beautiful metaphors without regard to their connection or logical sequence. This, again, we conceive to be palpably a misrepresentation. Where are the reasoning Pope and Dryden; that master of the argumentum ad absurdum, Butler; those logicians of the parlor, Swift and Prior, and Wolcot and Moore? Where is the whole race of metaphysical poets placed? Then, too, the large class of professedly didactic or speculative poets from Hesiod to Wordsworth, what becomes of them? Where is the critical Churchill, the moral Johnson, the religious Cowper? In fact, the poets are the greatest reasoners, the most accurate, brief and pointed, conveying an argument in a couplet, and a syllogism in a line. The Germans and Coleridge have settled the doctrine of the logical method of imagination, in her (apparently) wildest career, and that she has a law and sequence of her own, not to be measured by mechanical reasons. It must be conceded, besides, that poetical teaching is more beautiful than the lessons of the proseman; that fancy's illustrative coloring affords a grateful relief to the over-worked reason. In effect, too, the most captivating pictures afford the strongest arguments; an illustration is always an argument by analogy, a descriptive syllogism, or reasoning by picture.

We have thus concisely and categorically responded to the different points of objection, but we lay very little stress on any remarks of our own, except they be confirmed by a bulwark of testimony. Fortunately, we have a strong defence of this kind, behind which to entrench ourselves from sudden assaults, and we shall not hesitate to avail ourselves of the forces we have been able to collect. Sydney, our earliest prose writer, of classic rank, who was also a poet, was almost equally successful in both departments, and in his Defence of

Hosted by Google

Poesy, at least, a writer of pure, clear, sweet Virgilian prose. Hall's contemplations rival his versified satires, and are equally excellent; the magnificent declamation of Milton and the natural eloquence of Cowley are celebrated, yet the sermons of Donne, and the prose characters of Samuel Butler, are not to be forgotten. Quarles was no less close and pointed in his Enchiridion than in his Emblems. There are the letter-writers, Pope, Gray and Cowper, with Burns, Charles Lamb, and our own Willis. Even Hazlitt allows the perfect prose style of Dryden; yet the name of Goldsmith has been singularly overlooked.

Respectability in poetry is intolerable; yet we allow many degrees of excellence in prose. Third-rate poets sometimes have been converted into prose writers of the second class. Swift and Addison are known chiefly by their prose: they wrote clever verse also; no one would call either a great poet, yet they were great writers. Johnson's Rasselas, and the Lives of the Poets, place the prose writer where neither Irene nor London could by any possibility have placed him. Shenstone's maxims and essays more than counterbalance all his poetical works, with the exception of the Schoolmistress.

Where poets fail in prose, it is from a want of the more prosaic elements of composition. Coleridge, for instance had little practical shrewdness, though an imagination second only to Milton's, and much as Campbell's prose is at present censured (the causes of the weakness of which and of his ill-success in book making, latterly, are evident), let any one turn to his early essay on English Poetry, if he would find a model of beauty supported by strength and judgment, refined by art.

The poets are not, moreover, the best prose writers, but incomparably the best critics, especially of each other. The

Hosted by Google

vulgar error of the envy existing among men of genius, is as baseless as is the opinion that a fine poet is necessarily a weak critic, or the supposition that his imagination is too strong for his judgment. The greatest poets are not ignorant oracles of wisdom, but elaborate artists, who can give a reason for most of their works, though the very rarest melodies of their lyre are struck by a divine impulse above and beyond their command. There existed a crude and narrow notion of the critic formerly: that he was a spiteful, malicious libeller, rather than an honest judge and admiring advocate. The Queen Anne wits appeared to consider a good critic to be the reverse side of a bad poet, as the best vinegar was made out of the vilest cider. To pick flaws in reputations and writings once made a man's fame. Now, we know a little better. We can believe genuine criticism to be a labor of love, and the fruit of enthusiastic reverence.

Philosophical poetry is the deepest criticism, in the hands of the master-bards, Horace, Pope, Wordsworth and Dana. We entirely believe with Owen Felltham, that "a grave poem is the deepest kind of writing." Dramatic composition is, of all others, the most artificial form of writing—and we find the first tragic and comic writers profoundly conversant with the principles of their art, learned Ben, the judicious Beaumont, witty Congreve. So, too, the early classical translators into English, were philologists and critics of necessity, Fairfax and Chapman. The musing Drummond has left his judgment of books behind him—Dryden has written the best characters of Beaumont, and Fletcher, and rare Ben, that any critic has yet done; and he has left nothing for later writers to impair or add to his portrait of Shakespeare. "Glorious John's" prefaces are models of their kind, and the earliest specimens of good criticism in England. Shakspeare and

Hosted by Google

Milton, from the perfection of their works, we naturally infer to have been exquisite critics.

Butler, by his satire on the abuse of learning, and ridicule of the French, has disclosed a vein of caustic criticism. Cowley was a critic and philosopher, even more than a poet; he thoroughly appreciated the most opposite styles of poetry, the Pindaric and Anacreontic. "The Phenix Pindar," he has truly written, "is a vast species alone," and consequently, he is himself little more than an able follower, a capital imitator; but the spirit of Anacreon he has caught with wonderful felicity, and paraphrased him in a style immeasurably beyond Tom Moore. In truth, the Anacreontics of Cowley surpass even the gay flashes of Anacreon, in spirit and effect. Charles Second's wits were shrewd, sharp men of the world, satirists, and critics, not to be imposed upon by pretension. Of this assertion, the Duke of Buckingham's Rehearsal is a proof, and an inimitable satire—Rochester, Waller, St. Evremond, Roscommon, were all clear and discriminating critics; but their judgment did not reach very far.

Pope's finest philosophical poem is his Essay on Criticism; and the best imitators of Pope—Johnson and Rogers—are essentially critics with widely different tastes: Johnson rudely masculine, and Rogers delicate and fastidious to effeminacy.

To come to the present century; where do we read finer critical fragments than in Coleridge's Table Talk, and the notes to Lamb's Dramatic Specimens? Shelley was a metaphysical critic. Hunt and Lamb are perhaps the most delicate. The papers on Lear and on Shakspeare's tragedies are the very finest criticisms ever penned on that most fertile theme of eulogy—the Shakspearian Drama. Leigh Hunt has written a body of the most agreeable, if not the profoundest, criticism of his time. Mr. Dana has produced articles

Hosted by Google

on Kean's acting and Shakspeare that entitle him to rank with Lamb and Hunt.

As a general rule, the best prose writers are the safest critics for ordinary reading, if only from the absence of any possible competition. Where they rank with the greatest critics, it is from the large share they possess of the poetical temperament, and of fancy. The critic should be half poet, half philosopher; with acute powers of analysis, a lively fancy, deep sensibility, and close reasoning faculties. This is a very rare combination; yet Hazlitt, Rousseau, and Emerson, might be placed in this category, with a score or two of names besides, taken from the vast array of miscellaneous authors. The poet ranks first, the critic immediately below him; and the two united, each first of his class, combine to form the highest instance of imagination and intellectual power.

VII.

THE MORALITY OF POVERTY.

Poverty is a comparative term. Between the extremities of pauperism and that moderate competence, which the wealthy speak of with contempt, as a poor pittance, and which is certainly trifling in comparison with their "unsunn'd heaps," the interval is very wide. The condition of the very poor we do not take into consideration, at present, as the main topic of our inquiry, though we shall by no means omit to speak of them in turn; but we shall endeavor to present a picture of

Hosted by Google

simplicity and moderation in living, and the advantages of a sufficient competence (paradoxical as it may be thought) over an overgrown and superfluous income.

Poverty has many significations, with a wide range, embracing the pauper and the poor gentleman, aye, and the poor noble, in some countries. Kings even have been beggars, and have subsisted on casual bounty. The millionaire thinks all men poor, who are not possessed of equal wealth with himself; while the day laborer regards the small trader and master mechanic as rich men. In towns, one standard of wealth prevails; in the country it is much lower. Thus we find an ever varying measure of the goods of fortune. Of a nobler species of wealth, it is not so difficult to ascertain the true value. An excellent book is yet to be written for the rich, which should inform them of their duties towards their poorer neighbors; which should resolve the claims the poor have upon them, from the claims of nature, as well as from conventional position; which should confirm them in habits of benevolence and in the practice of "assisting the brethren." By assistance, we refer not merely to alms-giving, that being regarded as a fundamental part of charity. But we also include under that phrase, the giving of wise and disinterested counsel: defending from oppression and slander: persuading to the practice of right and justice: warning from evil, by instilling good principles and generous sentiments: and in the comprehensive language of Scripture, loving our neighbor as ourself, and consequently acting for him as if for ourself. Higher charity than this, is none: a charity the richest may be too poor to bestow; a charity the poorest may prove rich in dispensing. If love abounded, what a rich world would not this planet become! If man was to man a brother and a friend (at the same time

Hosted by Google

increasing the world's gear not a copper, and neither introducing any fantastical schemes of agrarian equality), in all the relations of life and family, as master and servant, father and son, brother and companion, artist and artisan, in sickness and in health, at home or abroad, there could be no poverty, no disappointment, and none but natural sorrows. For though many sources of grief would still continue fresh and open, as sickness, death, loss of friends and family, and failure in favorite plans of life and action, yet they would be so mitigated by an universal tenderness, and so suffered by a general sympathy, as to lose half their sharpness in losing all their repulsive features. No disappointments could then occur, because sincerity and plain dealing would take the place of falseness and deceit. None but a self-tormenter could then be unhappy, where all would become companions in good and evil seasons, and through every changing round of fortune's wheel. But this is an ideal not soon to be recognized.

A man without a penny has yet what all the wealth in the world cannot purchase—the human form and the human nature. With these, if he has health and resolution, he may become anything, except what can be reached only by innate genius or a higher order of mental gifts than his own. Give him education, you make him a scholar; breeding, you train him a gentleman; religion and morality, and you fill him with the sentiments of a Christian. Let no one say, the poor scholar or the poor gentleman is hurt by his education and manners. Pride often distorts those characters, but they ought to be above pride. A cultivated mind, so far from being trammelled by a narrow income, flies beyond it, and taste, the quality of the fine intellect, is a faculty of selection. The wisest economy is the nicest taste. Profusion is tasteless.

Hosted by Google

A man of fine judgment and small income will actually live in a more genteel style, than a rich, coarse-minded nabob. He may have fewer articles of expense, but they will be choice and delicate. His style of living will be frugal, yet elegant; which is more pleasing than extravagance without judgment. A genteel taste in living eschews extravagance, pomp, and all superfluity, as essentially vulgar. There is not a more pitiful sight than a mean-spirited man in a splendid house. His soul is too small for it. On the other hand, the great heart cannot be contained within the most magnificent palace, and yet may content itself in the most humble mansion. The great and good poor man, in his modest and retired parlor, affords a nobler spectacle than a king or a pyramid.

Riches too often excite absurdity of conduct: the giver of the gorgeous feast gets only a rich harvest of ridicule for his pains and anxiety. The master of an immense establishment is little better than the landlord of a great hotel. Guests enter and depart: he is pushed aside as a stranger and in the way. All this while his personal gratifications are limited. The poor soul! he lives for others, his wealth is for others. He is nobody himself—but go to the house where the man is greater than the mansion, and you forget the bare walls unhung with admirable paintings, for his face and the countenances of a loving circle are the finest portraits in the world; you tread on a carpet without reflecting it is no Brussels pattern, and you sit easily on a chair that has no satin cushions for the indolent parvenus of fashions. If a man is not rich, how much he avoids: from how many petty distractions is he not free? Plutus is even a severer master than Necessity.

In point of respectability the difference is great. Hardly

Hosted by Google

without an exception, the ancient families of this country, the descendants of the statesmen, and lawyers, and heroes of the revolution (our only real aristocracy), are poor. The rich class are, in the great majority of cases, sprung originally from the lowest class, who have acquired wealth by cunning and pernicious habits; without education, without sentiment; governed by no laws of courtesy, subservient to no dictates of the Spiritual Philosophy; coarse-minded and coarse-mannered, but clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day. With such as these, poverty of spirit and want of pelf are synonymous terms. The poor rich man and the rich poor man are the most perplexing problems.

Authors and professed scholars, excluded as in great measure they are from amassing a fortune, and ill paid for their elaborate labors, are among the objects of especial pity, not to say contempt (pitiable truly, and returning upon the contemner) of these bloated minions of Dives. They would patronize merit, and condescend to take genius by the hand. Contemptible arrogance! ye meanest of the mean, ignoble souls, whose highest privilege it is to be immortalized to posterity by the classic scorn of the indignant human creature you would protect; the true joys of the scholar, the calm life of the thinker, the grateful occupations of the author are unknown to you. Thriftless men, who in any other occupation would have succeeded as ill, and incapables, who should as soon have attempted shoemaking as authorship, have managed to reflect a most undeserved odium on those pursuits, which adorn wealth and elevate poverty, which beautify science and invigorate business. Worthily and in sincerity pursued, what occupation is so full of utility, as well as of delight, as literature. A mode of life that leads to reflection

Hosted by Google

and self-denial; that fosters humanity and begets an enlarged curiosity; that inclines equally to serious, resolved action, and to a gay, cheerful temper; which teaches to confine our wants and limit our desires, but at the same time to expand the affections, and to fortify the will; a mode of life that consecrates its followers as a select body of liberal spirits; that unites the cultivation of the highest faculties with the performance of the commonest duties; that inspires a sense of reverence in the dullest souls, and fascinates the roving eye of pleasure; employments, in fine, which form alone the worthiest labors of the wisest and best—these constitute the occupations and fill the hours of the scholar.

The literary life is never so happily spent as in a condition of moderate competence and in the enjoyment of social happiness. The wealthiest scholar, even if a man of genius, is obliged, from the nature of his position, and to avoid the scandal of meanness, or the odium of an unsociable disposition, to live in a manner abhorrent to his tastes and literary habits. He must live splendidly, when he would prefer elegance and quiet; he must entertain the indifferent and the inquisitive, where he had rather be surrounded by the chosen friends of his youth. In a word, the rich scholar must live like a mere rich man, and is in danger of sinking the first character in the second. Wealth has obscured genius which would have been drawn out by exertion; at least as often as talent has been obscured by misfortune.

A great error, though a very frequent one, is, that utter solitude and celibacy are suited to the man of letters. That the greatest works require long meditation and perfect repose is true. No less true is it that the periodical critic and essayist must pursue his labors in a state of serenity and partial retirement. The true literary life is a quiet existence. No

Hosted by Google

genuine scholar ever yet loved a crowd. Yet he loves society for conversation, and masses for observation of manners. He loves chiefly domestic pleasures; the good wife has often assisted, and never yet impeded, the occupations of her husband. The inmates of his dwelling learn to respect his hours of solitude and study. A judicious disposal of his time will leave the master his own master, and the experiences of domesticity will prove more rich and abundant than the knowledge of the hackney courtier or politician.

Privacy may boast of its heroes and heroism that a public scene cannot display. We look in the wrong place for truly great characters; we seek them in high stations, but seldom find them there. Magnanimity, like eloquence, is often found where we least expect it. There are more heroical actions occurring every day in the retirement of private life than are to be seen on the great public stage of the world. There is more of fortitude exhibited, more of patience in suffering, more true benevolence, a nobler charity, a wider and wiser generosity, deeper affection, and higher aims than the mind of a mere worldling can conceive. The reason is plain. The greatest intellects seek repose from vain struggles of ambition and inefficient plans of improvement. The gravest business of life, rightly viewed, is a mere farce, and those pleasing labors and endearing adversities, that make up a private life of contented trial and consequent happiness, are in fact higher and of more real importance. Domestic life is the only field for a certain class of virtues, by no means the least in value. These are of the softer and milder kind, amiable and attractive. Home is the school of the affections, as the world affords the test of the will and intellect. In that embowered valley bloom the sweet flowers of heart's-ease and contented joy.

Hosted by Google

The life of Wordsworth might be proposed as a model to the author who loves letters rather than a literary reputation, who prefers fame to fashion—not only to the poet but to the humblest prose writer, do we propose it. His fine maxim should be engraven on the heart of every true student—"Plain living, and high thinking." De Quincy, who published his recollections of the lake poets some years since, in Tait's Magazine, has described the life of the Miltonic Bard, as simple to frugality. He resided in a small cottage with his wife and sister; his guest was conducted into the largest room in the house, smaller than an ordinary bed-room, and which had another occupant, Wordsworth's eldest boy. The common sitting-room was half parlor and half kitchen. The great poet, like a good man, a lover of simple pleasures, delighted in his kettle's "faint undersong." His library was very small within doors, but without, what immense folios were his daily reading—the grand mountain scenery of his neighborhood. Nature is Wordsworth's library, or at least wisest commentator. Were he never so rich he could possess no pictures like the landscape around him. Even his friend, the fine painter, Sir George Beaumont, might only copy this original. And for company, what more needed he, to whom grand thoughts in rich abundance came flocking at his call; who possessed such an admirable sister and so excellent a wife. Southey was but a few hours' journey distant. Coleridge was sometimes his guest. There too came Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, and there ever abided guardian angels of the poet, the spirits of humanity and philosophy, in strict alliance with the Genius of Poesy!

None but a poor-spirited fool ever esteemed a man the less for his poverty, and pity, in such cases, is insult. The compassion is a glozing apology for the indulgence of purse pride,

Hosted by Google

the meanest form of Satan's favorite sin, and which he must heartily despise. He who devotes a life to letters cannot expect wealth: competency is the most he can look for, a thorough education, in it widest sense, for his children, and a comfortable, though confined maintenance for those dearest to him and least fitted to struggle with misfortune. A fair example and an honorable fame is a richer legacy than a large fortune without either. Most fortunate he who can unite all. But the spirit of study is adverse to the spirit of accumulation. A man with one idea, and that of money-making, can hardly fail, from one dollar, of realizing a million. But a man of many ideas, of a comprehensive spirit, and of aspiring views, can never contract his manly mind to the circumference of a store or factory. In his fixed and awful gaze at the wonders of creation, or in his rapt ecstasy at the celestial harmony of poesy, opportunities of profit will slip by, the golden moments of barter escape. His purse is lighter, it must be confessed; but he has gained a richer accession of fancies and feelings than the world can give or take away.

VIII.

CHAPTER ON SOME OLD AND LATER ENGLISH SONNETS.

THE sonnet is of Italian origin, and was imported into England from that country by the Earl of Surrey,

> "that renowned lord,
> Th' old English glory bravely that restor'd,
> That prince and poet (a name more divine),"

Hosted by Google

as Drayton enthusiastically writes. Originally a pupil of Petrarch, he left the metaphysical style of his master for a more gallant and courtly manner. He was "the bright particular star" of the court of Henry VIII., as Sidney was of that of Elizabeth, and resembled his famous successor in that dangerous post of favorite in more than one trait of his character. Like him, he was an accomplished gentleman, a graceful poet, an elegant scholar, and a gallant knight. Like him, he chanted soft, amorous lays to his chosen fair, and has immortalized the source of his inspiration in strains of melting beauty. Surrey is the first classic English poet (we place Chaucer at the head of the romantic school, before the era of Spenser and Shakspeare); and he was the first writer of English sonnets. He is said to have been the introducer of blank verse into our poetry. For these two gifts to our literature, if for none others, we should hold his reputation in honorable remembrance. We recollect no one sonnet of surpassing beauty (Mrs. Jameson, in her Loves of the Poets, has culled the finest lines): they will bear no comparison with succeeding pieces in the same department. And as we wish to secure space for certain fine specimens of Sidney, Shakspeare, Drummond, and Milton, we must not encumber our page with any but the choicest productions of the Muse.

We pass, then, to the all-accomplished Sidney. His sonnets are chiefly "vain and amatorious," yet full of "wit and worth." We agree heartily in Lamb's admiration for them, as well as for their admirable author, deprecating entirely the carping and illiberal spirit in which Hazlitt criticised them. The acutest and most eloquent English critic of this century was sometimes prejudiced and occasionally partial. We find him so here. For delicacy, fancy, and purity of feeling, Sidney is the finest of English writers of the sonnet. He is

Hosted by Google

certainly less weighty and grand than Milton, less pathetic than Drummond, far less copious and rich than Wordsworth, yet in the graceful union of the Poet and Lover surpassing all. He is here, as in his life and actions, the Knight "sans peur et sans reproche." Stella, the goddess of his idolatry, was at once his mistress and his muse; anciently, a very frequent combination of characters. We know not, but believe the sonnets of Sidney are little known. This, and the intrinsic beauty of the poem, must serve to excuse us for the following extract:

Because I oft in dark abstracted guise
Seem most alone in greatest company,
With dearth of words, or answer quite awry
To them that would make speech of speech arise,
They deem, and of their doom the rumor flies,
That poison foul of bubbling Pride doth lie
So in my swelling breast, that only I
Fawn on myself, and others do despise.
For Pride I think doth not my soul possess,
Which looks too oft in his unflattering glass;
But one worse fault, Ambition, I confess,
That makes me oft my best friends overpass,
Unseen, unheard, while thought to highest place,
Bends all his powers, even unto Stella's grace.

In a further beautiful sonnet occurs this fanciful apostrophe to Sleep:

Come, Sleep, O Sleep, the certain knot of peace,
The baiting-place of wit, the balm of woe,
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
The indifferent judge between the high and low.

Hosted by Google

This reminds us strongly of Shakspeare's famous exclamation of Macbeth, bent on his murderous errand:

> ——— the innocent sleep;
> Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,
> Chief Nourisher in life's feast.

The sonnets of Sidney are highly characteristic. They combine contemplation and knightly grace. They were written in the heyday of his blood (he died at the age of thirty-four): and cannot be fairly compared with the later productions of a greater and more mature genius. Sidney, it must not be forgotten, was a courtier and chivalrous soldier, no less than the admired poet of his time, and we should allow accordingly in our estimate of his poetry. He filled a brief career with monuments of literary glory and military honor: he endeared himself to a nation by his graces and worth, and drew friends and followers to his heart, by its sincerity and virtues. He died "with his martial cloak about him," and full of fame. It was reckoned an honor to have been his friend. History records not his enemy.

The little we know of Shakspeare is to be learnt from a perusal of his sonnets, which afford a glimpse of poetical autobiography. The main particulars are his devoted gratitude to his noble patron, the generous Earl of Southampton, and his romantic attachment to a "fair personne," who is supposed to have been a beautiful specimen of an unfortunate class of females. Our "myriad-minded" bard, far above the general order of humanity, as he was, from his vast intellectual superiority, was yet a very man (and for that we love him all the better) in his affections and passions, like to one of us.

Hosted by Google

The most profound of philosophers, the noblest of humorists, the grandest painter of the passions, was a lover and gallant gentleman. Perhaps his constancy was unable to stand the test of temptation upon all occasions (but that we may allow to a roving and excited youth): though after middle life we hear of his quiet life as a landholder and paterfamilias. Doubtless "the reaming swaats that drank divinely" at the Mermaid, and his lively associates at the Globe Theatre, were sometimes too much for any prudential plan of life. But in those scenes the great teacher learnt many an instructive lesson, which he has taught us; nor shall we dare to arraign the venial follies of the selectest spirit of our race. We find numerous single lines and couplets in some of these sonnets that develope the character of their author more fully than any labored biographical or critical commentary. He gives us pictures of his own feelings, his desiring "this man's art and that man's scope:" he apologizes for his profession as an actor, insinuating that it degrades him not (as it never should degrade any, but as it too often tends to degradation). He fairly speaks out a lofty self-estimate, none the less true for its candour:

> Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
> But you shall shine more bright in these contents
> Than unwept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.
> When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
> And broils root out the work of masonry,
> Nor Mars's sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
> The living record of your memory.

The vulgar error of Shakspeare's reserve must have arisen with those who never saw his miscellaneous poems. It is

Hosted by Google

true amid the varied characters that stud his dramatic page, it is impossible to fasten any upon him, who painted them all. But we find self-confession enough in the sonnets, and we are much surprised at the nature of it, so much of melancholy and repining, utterly unlike our idea of the robust genius and vigorous heart of the creator of Falstaff and of Lear.

Shakspeare's best sonnets, and indeed nearly all of them, are devoted to the expression of an apparently hopeless passion. They form a love history, mysterious and obscure, which we shall not attempt to penetrate. It is enough to add, that (which might be premised as impossible) they do not raise Shakspeare to a higher rank than he before attained: that perhaps we idolize his fame less where we were admitted (too freely) into certain secrets of his personal history, and it must also be confessed that he has dallied with the muse in these offerings at her shrine, rather than put forth his Samson strength in lofty triumph.

On no one occasion does he attempt to reach a higher pitch than was attained by the general attempts in the same form of poetry. It is true even the lightest trifles are impressed with a nameless spirit from his exuberant genius and subtle individuality. It is true his phrases, his expressive language, are eminently Shakesperean. Yet are they comparatively wasted on trivial themes, or levelled to a moderate key-note of passion. They contain none of the deep contemplativeness of Wordsworth, or the spirited yet condensed power of Milton. We speak thus of these productions in comparison with similar attempts of other great poets; and more especially in comparison with the other works of Shakspeare—his dramas, the richest legacy ever bequeathed to mankind by a single individual. For any other bard, it would be praise enough

Hosted by Google

to have equalled the least valuable works of Shakspeare, and these sonnets would have made the reputation of almost any one else. The two finest occur in one of his plays;* that on *Study*, beginning, "Study is like heaven's glorious sun," and that more tender passage of self-expostulation and apology, for which we must make room:

Did not the heavenly rhetoric of thine eye,
'Gainst whom the world cannot hold argument,
Persuade my heart to this false perjury?
Vows for thee broke, deserve not punishment.
A woman I forswore; but I will prove,
Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee:
My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love;
Thy grace being gain'd, cures all disgrace in me.
My vow was breath, and breath a vapor is;
Then thou, fair sun, which on my earth dost shine,
Exhal'st this vapor vow; in thee it is:
If broken, then it is no fault of mine.
If by me broke, what fool is not so wise
To break an oath, to win a Paradise?

His picture of his mistress forms a fair pendant to the above, and should not therefore be omitted:

Fair is my love, but not as fair as fickle;
Mild as a dove, but neither true nor trusty;
Brighter than glass, and yet, as glass is, brittle;
Softer than wax, and yet, as iron, rusty;
A little pale, with damask dye to grace her;
None fairer, nor one falser to deface her.
Her lips to mine how often hath she joined,
Between each kiss her oaths of true love swearing!
How many tales to please me hath she coin'd,

* Love's Labor Lost.

Hosted by Google

Dreading my love, the loss whereof still fearing !
Yet in the midst of all her pure protestings,
Her faith, her oaths, her tears, and all, were jestings.
She burnt with love, as straw with fire flameth,
She burnt with love, as soon as straw outburneth ;
She fram'd the love, and yet she foil'd the framing.
She bade love last, and yet she fell a turning.
Was this a lover, or a lecher whether ?
Bad in the best, though excellent in neither.*

Passing over the slight effusions of forgotten versifiers, our list brings us next to Drummond of Hawthornden, the best representative of the Scottish muse before Allan Ramsay's time, and the friend of Ben Jonson. The record of their famous conversations has been made public of late years through the researches of one of the Antiquarian Societies. Like all of the early sonneteers, who copied their master Petrarch in this, as in other respects, Drummond had his mistress for a muse—but the specimen we shall present of his sonnets is one of a more general description. It is addressed to Sleep, and discovers a close resemblance to the verses of Sidney and Shakspeare, before quoted :

Sleep, silence' child, sweet father of soft rest,
Prince whose approach peace to all mortals brings,
Indifferent host to shepherds and to kings,
Sole comforter of minds which are opprest ;
Lo by thy charming rod all breathing things
Lie slumb'ring with forgetfulness possest,
And yet oe'r me to spread thy drowsy wings
Thou sparest (alas !) who cannot be thy guest.
Since I am thine, O come, but with that face
To inward light which thou were wont to show,

* A somewhat similar history is to be read in the "Modern Pygmalion" of a late brilliant critic and metaphysician.

Hosted by Google

With fancied solace ease a true-felt woe;
Or if, deaf god, thou do deny that grace,
Come as thou wilt, and what thou wilt bequeath:
I long to kiss the image of my death.

This poet is distinguished for a sweet and elegant pathetic vein; his line is "most musical, most melancholy." He writes thus of his prevalent manner, in a sonnet on his Lute:

What art thou but a harbinger of woe?
Thy pleasing notes be pleasing notes no more,
But orphan's wailings to the fainting ear,
Each stroke a sigh, each sound draws forth a tear,
For which be silent as in words before:
Or if that any hand to touch thee deign,
Like widow'd turtle still her loss complain.

For this lugubrious coloring he accounts by the absence of "that dear voice," which did thy sounds approve:

Which wont in such harmonious strains to flow,
Is reft from earth to tune those spheres above.

Milton is the last great name of the elder bards we shall presume to invoke. He is the second sonnet writer in English; we place Wordsworth at the head. Some half dozen of Milton's [he wrote altogether only fourteen, we believe] are unequalled. But though our great living poet rarely rises as high as Milton, yet his copiousness and unmatched volubility of expression combine to give him the precedence. Shakspeare we place out of comparison, since he attempted no sonnets of the reflective kind. Few of Wordsworth's bear any mention of love, and where they do speak of it, it is

Hosted by Google

a holy thing, not the libertine passion of courtly versifiers. Milton's grandest sonnets, each of them a small epic in itself, have been sufficiently noticed; but there is one less referred to, that we think deserves the more regard, from its personal nature, referring to himself with a certain sublime self-consideration and Grecian enthusiasm, that bespeak the builder of the loftiest of epics.

When the assault was intended on the city—

> Captain, or colonel, or knight in arms,
> Whose chance on these defenceless doors may seize,
> If deed of honor did thee ever please,
> Guard them, and him within protect from harms.
> He can requite thee; for he knows the charms
> That call fame on such gentle acts as these,
> And he can spread thy name o'er lands and seas,
> Whatever clime the sun's bright circle warms.
> Lift not thy spear against the Muse's bower;
> The great Emathian conqueror bid spare
> The house of Pindarus, when temple and tower
> Went to the ground; and the repeated air
> Of sad Electra's Poet had the power
> To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.

The sonnet is, perhaps, the most artificial form of poetry, and, in consequence, the most difficult to execute with spirit. The chief difficulty appears to lie in preserving the unity and integrity of the single thought or sentiment which it is intended to express and convey. It is essential that the idea be not departed from, though various shades of meaning may be introduced with effect. It is no less important that the idea be completely filled out; a meagre sketch being equally faulty with a superfluous abundance of thoughts. The restriction to just fourteen lines is an obstacle of itself to the

Hosted by Google

prosecution of a genial poetic design. Rapt in his visions of beauty, the poet must still not stray beyond this fixed limit, which appears arbitrary enough. Yet these very restrictions tend to compactness and symmetrical beauty. To a cultivated ear, the music of a fine sonnet is not the least pleasing adjunct to this form of verse; nor should we overlook the advantage gained to the thought itself by such an harmonious yet concise utterance of it.

Like those minor forms of prose writing, the letter and the essay, the sonnet is happy in an unlimited range of subject and variety of style, of martial or sentimental, amorous, philosophic, familiar and pathetic. It is a miniature ode, with less of variety and more formal design; but it enjoys in common with the ode, the characteristic of a susceptibility of conveying strong personal traits, and of rendering itself instinct with the most individual subtleties of personal character. But why do we enlarge upon this theme, when we have the noble sonnet of Wordsworth at hand, at once the highest defence and purest eulogium upon sonnets and the writers of them?

> Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
> Mindless of its just honors; with this key
> Shakspeare unlocked his heart; the melody
> Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;
> A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
> Camoens soothed with it an exile's grief;
> The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
> Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
> His visionary brow; a glow-worm lamp,
> It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land
> To struggle through dark ways; and when a damp
> Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
> The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
> Soul-animating strains—alas, too few!

Hosted by Google

Since the time of Milton, sonnet-writing has been little in vogue, until the commencement of the present century. The wits of Charles's days were too much occupied with libertine songs or political epigrams, to pen thoughtful and elaborate poetry. The wits of Queen Anne were too courtly and artificial to relish musings on nature, or philosophical meditations, or amorous conceits, after the old fashion. And though it may seem paradoxical to remark it, the sonnet was too artificial a form of writing even for the most artificial of English Poets, Dryden and Pope. But its art evinced higher principles of harmony than the polished couplet required. We do not recollect a single sonnet of the first, or even second class of excellence, from Milton to Thomas Warton. Butler, Rochester, Denham, Waller, Roscommon, wrote none: neither did any of the religious poets of that age, Quarles, Herbert, Donne, or Crashaw. Cowley, in his fine-spun reveries, comes nearest to the matter of the best sonnet-writers, but his manner is different. If we come to the next epoch of English verse, we find not a single sonnet in the writings of Dryden, Pope, Swift, Gay, Addison, Steele, &c. It is only in a thoughtful and tasteful character, by a lover of meditative leisure, an admirer of nature, that the sonnet is ever likely to be cultivated. It presents no brilliant points for the man of wit; it is tedious and diffuse for the gay man of lively talent. It is a form of poetry that would never strike the lovers of satire or pictures of artificial manners agreeably; unless, as the pastoral struck the Queen Anne poets, as a subject for burlesque. A true reader of the sonnet loves not the glare of what passes for *strong lines*, brilliant passages. This may be readily seen in the difference of taste, and in conception of the poetical character, that distinguishes the followers of Wordsworth and of Byron.

Hosted by Google

Before the time of the Lake Poets and their followers, both together, including the finest poets this century has produced, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt, we can point but to one true poet who wrote good sonnets, almost worthy of Drummond—Thomas Warton. Warton was a man of elegant fancy and fine sensibility, but without any vigorous imagination or peculiar individuality. Yet Hazlitt, much to the surprise of his readers, says, that he cannot help preferring his sonnets to any in the language. Now, paralleled by Milton or Wordsworth, Warton is feeble; though he is forcible in comparison with Bowles. We annex his very best sonnet, as it reads to us; so much superior to the remainder, that it appears to have been the work of another hand.

Written in a blank-leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon.

Deem not devoid of elegance, the sage,
By fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd
Of painful pedantry the poring child,
Who turns, of these proud domes, th' historic page,
Now sunk by time and Henry's fiercer rage.
Think'st thou the warbling muses never smil'd
On his lone hours? Ingenuous views engage
His thoughts, on themes, unclassic falsely styl'd,
Intent. While cloister'd piety displays
Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores
New manners, and the pomp of elder days,
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.
Nor rough, nor barren are the winding ways
Of hoar antiquity, but strown with flowers.

During what may be called the Hayley rage, when the author of the Triumphs of Temper was esteemed a great poet (so barren was the vineyard of genial laborers), a band of sonneteers arose, who have deservedly been forgotten. For

Hosted by Google

of all imbecilities, to use a Carlyleism, that of writing weak poetry is at once the most pitiable and the most reprehensible. The poetic offspring, worthily begotten, thrives even amidst the bleak freezings of Neglect: but a puny poem, like a puny child, rarely lives long, and only usurps the place of something better. We may speak thus, at the present time, of the attempts of Miss Seward and Charlotte Smith, since we have been treated to more delicate cates and fed on heavenly food. Later still and nearer to our own time, we have instances of men of poetic taste, though utterly devoid of all poetic genius, who have failed signally in the sonnet, and who are only known from their general connection with literature. The Rev. W. Lisle Bowles is better known from Coleridge's early admiration of his sonnets, and from his stake in the Pope controversy, than from any one other reason. In the latter he failed to gain his cause, though on the right side. Coleridge is said to have transcribed his sonnets forty times in the course of eighteen months in order to make presents of them to his school-fellows; we can only account for it by the fact, that many inferior authors have sometimes been more suggestive than their masters, and it may have been a mere vagary of a boy of genius. Coleridge's own sonnet, addressed to Bowles, is richly worth the whole of Bowles's sonnets put together. George Dyer, the friend of Lamb the antiquary (whose character Lamb has so admirably depicted,) the historian of Cambridge, the scholar and gentle companion, will be known to posterity solely through the medium of his friend's original humor and delicious irony, which he so widely mistook. Leigh Hunt, though a graceful narrator, a charming essayist, and a lively critic; a friend of poets, and in other walks, a pleasing poet himself, has yet been unable to do justice to his fine genius in the sonnet.

Hosted by Google

His friend, Charles Lamb, too, has done his best things in prose. But among the few sonnets left by the inimitable Elia, occur three perfect specimens—that on Cambridge, and those on Work, and Leisure.

Lamb's latest publisher, Moxon, has written some very tolerable sonnets—for a bookseller; though they are tainted with the general defect of feebleness. The Hon. R. Monckton Milnes, the parliamentary poet, may be ranked in the same category. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, are the writers of the genuine sonnet, in this nineteenth century, and by far the best poets. The majestic tone and deep feeling of the first, the learned invention and universality of talent of the second, and the exuberant fancy of the third, can fitly be measured by none but the same standards that we apply to the old Elizabethan poets and to Milton.

Wordsworth is now confessedly the finest sonnet writer in the world, equalling in many sonnets, even the majesty, the tenderness and Attic grace of Milton in a few. Wordsworth's copiousness is remarkable, and at the same time his richness of thought and expression. A mechanical writer might turn out sonnets by the dozen, but of what value, we would inquire. Wordsworth's are admirable, perfectly appropriate, and harmonious as the breathings of Apollo's flute. Occasionally, he blows a noble blast, as from a silver trumpet of surpassing power; but his favorite style may be likened to the music of a chamber-organ, though he can also make the massive pealing organ of the cathedral blow. His range is universal; moral, patriotic, tender, domestic. He is meditative, playful, familiar. We should be ashamed to quote specimens of Wordsworth, were he not really still a poet unknown to the mass, even of educated readers. There are ten copies of Byron, Moore, or Scott, sold (at least) to one of Wordsworth, who is worth all three.

Hosted by Google

Of the different series, we prefer the Miscellaneous Sonnets, and next to them, the sonnet dedicated to Liberty; the Ecclesiastical sonnets are less interesting to the general reader, and written with less power, but they add a new and peculiar grace to the history of the British Church, and ought to be enshrined in the hearts of its members.

The following should form the guiding maxims of the patriot, and evince a noble sympathy with political liberty and individual greatness:

XIV.

Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour;
England hath need of thee; she is a fen
Of stagnant waters; altar, sword and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wreath of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower,
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea,
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free.
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

XV.

Great men have been among us: hands that penned
And tongues that uttered wisdom better none:
The later Sidney, Marvel, Harrington,
Young Vane, and others who called Milton friend.
These moralists could act and comprehend:
They knew how genuine glory was put on;
Taught us how rightfully a nation shone
In splendor; what strength was, that would not bend

Hosted by Google

But in magnanimous meekness. France, 'tis strange
Has brought forth no such souls as we had then.
Perpetual emptiness! unceasing change!
No single volume paramount, no code,
No master spirit, no determined road;
But equally a want of books and men!

Of the Miscellaneous Sonnets, two-thirds of which are pure gold, we quote only the beautiful sonnet on the departure of Sir Walter Scott from Abbotsford, for Naples:

A trouble, not of clouds, or weeping rain,
Nor of the setting Sun's pathetic light
Engender'd, hangs o'er Eildon's triple height.
Spirits of power, assembled there, complain
For kindred power departing from their sight;
While Tweed, best pleased in chanting a blithe strain,
Saddens his voice again, and yet again.
Lift up your hearts, ye mourners! for the might
Of the whole world's good wishes with him goes:
Blessings and prayers in nobler retinue
Than sceptred king or laurelled conqueror knows,
Follow this wondrous potentate. Be true,
Ye winds of ocean and the midland sea,
Wafting your charge to soft Parthenope!

Coleridge wrote but few sonnets, but they are among the most admirable of the fragments of his poetic genius. Most of them are political, celebrating some one of his favorite heroes, Burke, Priestley, Erskine, Sheridan, Kosciusko, Lafayette. The remainder are of a wholly personal nature, full either of early aspiration, or maturer despondency; cheerful and ardent, or instinct with a mild yet manly melancholy. The two we extract, are typical of the different traits we have mentioned.

Hosted by Google

Here is that noble address,

TO THE AUTHOR OF THE ROBBERS.

Schiller! that hour I would have wished to die,
If through the shuddering midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famished father's cry—
Lest in some after moment, aught more mean
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
Black horror screamed, and all her goblin rout
Diminished shrunk from the more withering scene!
Ah, bard! tremendous in simplicity!
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood
Wandering at eve with finely-frenzied eye
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood?
Awhile with mute awe gazing I would brood:
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstasy.

This in a different vein. It is in reply "to a friend who asked how I felt when the nurse first presented my infant to me."

Charles! my slow heart was only sad, when first
I scanned that face of feeble infancy:
For dimly on my thoughtful spirit burst
All I had been, and all my child might be!
But when I saw it on its mother's arm,
And hanging at her bosom (she the while
Bent o'er its features with a tearful smile),
Then I was thrilled, and melted, and most warm
Impressed a father's kiss; and all beguiled
Of dark remembrance and presageful fear,
I seemed to see an angel form appear—
'Twas even thine, beloved woman mild!
So for the mother's sake the child was dear,
And dearer was the mother for the child.

Hosted by Google

With Keats we close our very slight sketch of writers of the sonnet. A late article in Arcturus Magazine (Dec., 1841), has done him true poetic justice. To this delicate appreciation of the young English Poet, as Hunt affectionately calls him, we can add nothing, but only contribute a hearty assent. The hour has come at last for Keats, that always comes to the true poet. A brother bard (J. R. Lowell) whose first volume contains passages and poems Keats would have been willing to acknowledge, and whose own delicate genius enables him to appreciate a cognate talent, has done honor to the English bard in stanzas, that put to the blush all prose criticisms. Poets should criticise each other, or rather be the most intelligent admirers of their respective talents. A critic is " of understanding all compact," and wants imagination to relish the finest touches. " The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo."

IX.

JEREMY TAYLOR, THE SPENSER OF DIVINITY.

A POET should be the critic of Jeremy Taylor, for he was one himself, and hence needs a poetic mind for his interpreter and eulogist. Bald criticism becomes still more barren (by contrast) when exercised on the flowery genius of the prince of pulpit orators. Taylor thought in pictures, and his ideas were shadowed out in lively images of beauty. His fancy colored his understanding, which rather painted elaborate

Hosted by Google

metaphors, "long drawn out," than analyzed the complexity of a problem, or conducted the discussion of a topic, by logical processes. The material world furnished his stock of similes. He drew on it for illustrations, rather than seek them in the workings of his own mind. His descriptions are almost palpable. They have an air of reality. His landscape is enveloped in a warm and glowing atmosphere; his light is "from heaven." His style is rich and luxuriant. He is all grace, beauty, melody. He does not appear so anxious to get at the result of an argument, to fix the certainty of a proposition, as to give the finest coloring to a received sentiment. He is more descriptive and less speculative. He reposes on the lap of beauty. He revels in her creations. The thirst of his soul was for the beautiful. This was with him almost synonymous with the good—"the first good and the first fair." Is it not so? Is not the highest truth the highest form of beauty? Our common idea of beauty is more sensual and tinged with earthliness. But the platonic and spiritual conception is nobler and truer.

There was a period when the volumes of Taylor lay comparatively neglected: when the Blair taste was dominant. This sensible but cold critic does not even refer to Taylor in his lecture on pulpit eloquence. The present race of critics' unlike Blair, are for elevating Taylor as the very first of orators. Of pulpit orators, he is, indeed, the Chrysostom; but Burke holds the first, the highest place of all orators. With the poet's imagination, he had also the logician's art and the deep reflection of the philosopher. Burke had less multifarious acquisition, and his intellect worked all the better. Taylor had a vast quantity of useless learning, which had the ill-effect of inducing a certain laxity of belief. I mean laxity in a good sense. He was too credulous. His faith as well as

Hosted by Google

his memory was equally tenacious of all statements, whether well or ill-founded. Bishop Heber notices this individual character of Taylor in his life.

Undoubtedly, Taylor is a first-rate genius of the descriptive kind. His strength lay in that; and his range, too, was universal. He painted every scene and every varying phase of any one. He is Claude, Rubens, Rembrandt and Raphael combined. He unites softness, richness, depth of shadow, and pure beauty.

Taylor has been called the "Shakspeare of Divinity"— a parallel that requires some limitation. If, by this, it be meant that, compared with other preachers, he had a richer fancy, greater copiousness of poetic sentiment, and an unequalled profusion of beautiful metaphor, the praise is just; but if it be intended to express that, like Shakspeare, he was gifted with an union of wonderful and various powers, almost superhuman, the criticism is extravagant, if not absurd. For, in his printed works, we can find not a gleam of wit or humor —scarcely any talent for portrait-painting—no profound depth of reflection—no nice observation of real life. We say this with no intention of undervaluing Taylor; but only to show the folly of any close comparison between him and Shakspeare. We would rather say, Taylor was the Spenser of Divinity. With Spenser, Taylor is eminently a descriptive writer. His imagination is pictorial; and, although without the allegory of Spenser, he has the same bland amenity of sentiment— the same untiring particularity of description—the same angelic purity of thought—the same harmonious structure of composition.

Taylor is the painter: inferior to Barrow in point of reason, and to Clark in reasoning; without a tithe of South's wit or epigrammatic smartness: less ingenious than Donne: he has

Hosted by Google

a fancy and style far more beautiful than any prose writer before his time, and perhaps since. It has been called "unmeasured poetry." The Edinburgh Review and Coleridge (critics wide apart) have joined in pronouncing his writings more truly poetic than most of the odes and epics that have been produced in Europe since his day. And Hazlitt (surest critic of all) quotes a fine passage from Beaumont, which is apparently a translation of Taylor's prose into verse, and made, too, merely by occasional transposition of the words from the order in which they originally stood. Taylor is, therefore, confessedly a master of poetical prose. This term is sometimes used by way of dubious praise, since most writing of the kind is a wretched farrago of such tinsel and faded ornament as would disgrace Rag Fair. Taylor's composition is of quite a different grain. His style is naturally poetic, from the character of his mind; he had that poetic sensibility of feeling that saw beauty and deep meaning in everything. His imagination colored the commonest object on which it lighted, as the bow of promise throws its tints over all creation; through this, as a veil, every object appeared bright and blooming, like the flowers of spring, or dark and terrible, like the thunder-cloud of summer. Its general hue was mild and gentle; he had a more genial feeling for beauty than for grandeur, though his awful description of the Last Judgment is stamped with the sublime force of Michael Angelo, or rather, like Rembrandt's shadows, terrible with excess of gloom. In this grand picture are collected all the images of terror and dismay, fused into a powerful whole by his so potent art. It is first a solemn anthem—a version of the monkish canticle: then you hear (in imagination) the deep bass note of the last thunder that shall ever peal through the sky. You are almost blinded by the lightenings that gleam in his style.

Hosted by Google

Presently, a horrid shriek of despair (the accumulated wailing of millions of evil spirits) rises on the affrighted ear. And anon, the trumpet with a silver sound is blown several times, and all is still. With what a subtle power this master plays on the conscience of his readers! He makes the boldest tremble: he magnifies, he reiterates, until the best of men shall think himself a fellow of the vilest!

Such, however, is not a scene congenial to Taylor's temper. In his description he most affects the tender and pathetic notes of humanity. He plays admirably on every chord of passion, but on some much oftener and more artfully than on others. He is both "a son of thunder and a son of consolation." With all his powers of terrifying the soul, he most loves to entreat its gratitude to God and the practice of religion. He takes delight in painting the innocence of childhood, the purity of virgins, the sacred mystery of marriage, the gentle voice of pity, the mercy of our Father, the love of his Son.

His landscape is oftener quiet and in repose, than savage or deserted. His favorite breezes are rather zephyrs, than

> The wind Euroclydon—
> The storm wind.

His florid genius, like his sweet disposition, delighted in heavenly lays, and doubtless his piety was not a little the offspring of his temperament and genius.

Taylor, in his pictures, further resembled Spenser in the prolixity of his style—dwelling on minute points and carefully finishing every trait. He had none of Milton's concise force, that painted a picture by an epithet or a line. If Taylor had the building of Pandemonium, he would have occupied six times the space Milton took for its construction.

Hosted by Google

Milton made it to "rise like an exhalation;" Taylor would have expanded the line into a page, where each member of the sentence would have formed a series of steps leading from the foundation to the dome of the Infernal Hall.

It may be proper here to notice a peculiarity of Taylor's illustrations—they are almost always for ornament; he does not employ a simile to clench his argument; he does not make his fancy logical; but describes and paints for the pleasure of the picture. His similes, so delightful in the reading, must have been intolerably long for delivery. Public speaking requires greater compactness of mind than Taylor possessed, and yet we hear of his wonderful success, which was not slightly heightened by a beautiful person, a face "like an angel," and an elocution that ravished all hearers with its swelling cadences and sweet intonations.

Taylor, in his frequent and curious quotations, is almost a Burton. A reason for this deference to foreign testimony may be gathered from the fact of the respect for authority cherished by the early divines. Just loosed from the Church of Rome, it was but natural they should cling to the first vouchers of the truth, the primitive defenders of the faith. Modern free-thinking and the fashionable doctrine of independency of opinion had not yet made those morning stars of the church to rely too completely on their own internal light—they rather reflected and gave back the light from above.

Hosted by Google

X.

CHURCH MUSIC.

"I think he hath not a mind well-tempered, whose zeal is not inflamed by a heavenly anthem."—*Owen Feltham.*

THERE is no music like church music, nor any songs of equal excellence with the songs of Zion. Light, airy strains delight the ear and enervate the sense, but reach not the soul; dull, mournful tones induce melancholy and sadness; but the songs of praise and thanksgiving, of exultant hope and religious joy, of repentance and gratitude, touch the heart more nearly, affect the soul in her inmost recesses, and descend into the very depths of a troubled and contrite spirit. The hopeful Christian, too, is cheered by devout music, breathing peace and rest. And he must be a most indifferent auditor who can listen, unmoved, to any species of church music, of whatever sect, or to whatever degree of refinement it attains. For my own part, I love all, from the simplest Methodist hymn to the richest cathedral vespers of the Roman Catholic Church: and I believe there is a species of pure, devotional feeling that cannot fitly be told in language, nor manifested in any other way, that is exhibited in music. Prayer and preaching have their fit place, and are of essential importance in divine worship; but praise must not be absent. Psalmody is prayer set to music; and the majestic anthem is no less than a more elevated form of address to the Almighty Father. External harmony is but the exponent of a finer internal sense of order and design; and that, we are taught, is "Heaven's first law." Without organ music, and the vocal accompaniment of a choir, the services of the church appear shorn of a large portion of their dignity and beauty,

Hosted by Google

and wanting in an important feature. This feeling we are happy to share with the master spirits of our church, the testimonials of some of whom, to the efficacy and fascination of this Christian Art, we shall presently enumerate.

We call this a Christian Art, and such it certainly is. In the middle age, and just before the revival of learning, when the modern arts first took their rise and origin, all of the arts at present styled the fine arts, were consecrated wholly to the service of the Church. The architecture of that period was the Gothic, especially adapted to churches, though afterwards employed in other buildings, the castellated mansion of the noble, and the palace of the king. The first modern paintings were of our Saviour, and the Virgin Mary, and the Apostles, and the scenes and incidents of the Old and New Testaments. The music was choral and religious; the orisons of the monk, the matins of the friar, the mass and vespers of the chapel. The eloquence was purely and almost restrictedly Episcopal, or Missionary. Even the Drama had its first beginning in the representation of Mysteries and Moralities. And to bring down the illustrations to our own day, we find Christianity the prominent symbol of the Arts; or rather the Arts, the peculiar ministers of Religion. Thus we still see no nobler edifices than those consecrated to the worship of the true God; St. Peter's, St. Paul's, Notre Dame, the Madelaine, York Minster, and the noble churches of Germany. The finest paintings of Raphael, of Guido, of Corregio, of Titian, of Murillo, of Rubens, of Rembrandt, and of Leonardo di Vinci, are from Scripture subjects, and themes sacred to the Christian. Sacred music, in the hands of Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven, is beyond all other music; and it should be our peculiar pride, that much of our noble church music came fresh from the glowing hand and

Hosted by Google

seraphic ear of the immortal Handel. In point of eloquence, no oratory yet has equalled that of the pulpit. We speak advisedly (with Taylor, and Massillon, and Whitfield, and, greatest of all orators, St. Paul, in our eye). We say, as we know, nothing, of the fathers and Roman Catholic doctors; but unless a general conspiracy has arisen to pervert the truth, their writings must contain a mine of rich thoughts, elaborate reasonings, and brilliant fancies. But of the English divines we can speak from some acquaintance; and we feel amply warranted in declaring, that they have (as a body) never been equalled, in kind or degree, in point of natural or acquired gifts; embracing the wide circle of eloquence, argument, wit, fancy, erudition, and research. The noblest poetry of not only modern times, but of all times, is deeply devout. The greatest epic the world has produced, is founded on sacred story; and the writings of all true poets have ever been instinct with a spirit of awful reverence, of charity, and comprehensive love, and of sympathy with the good, the beautiful, and the true; and this is Christianity. We have digressed from the main point, and yet not wandered into any very irrelevant train of thought. For the whole subject is closely connected, in all its parts; and what is true of music as a Christian art, is equally true of the other arts; of architecture, painting, eloquence, and poetry.

The elegant Horne has left a sermon on Church Music, which we have not been able to procure; but which we recommend to our readers. The finest thing, however, we have met with on this subject, is that magnificent passage of Hooker,* which may be readily turned to, but is too long for transcription.

Feltham and Sir William Temple have both hit upon the

* Book v., § 38.

Hosted by Google

same quotation, a notion of the Fathers, that God loves not him who loves not music; and they taught, that a love of music was a species of predestinated assurance of a man's acceptance with heaven. Of music, and hymns, and lyres, and the trumpet, and golden harps, we read in Scripture; and that there are hallelujahs in heaven; and though some blaspheming wit sneeringly asked if heaven were a singing-school, we may affirm that, amidst the choicest incense offered to the adorable Trinity, may very reasonably be included a celestial harmony of voice and instrument, such as mortal ears have never heard, and such as human imaginations may not dare to conceive. But let us see what others, and great names too, have to say on this topic. We shall adduce only those instances occurring to us readily, and omit many fine passages from authors whose books we do not happen to have at hand.

Of Church Music, thus spoke that fine poet and true Christian, Dr. Donne: "And oh, the power of church music! that harmony, added to this hymn, that raised the affections of my heart, and quickened my graces of zeal and gratitude; and I observe that I always return from paying this public duty of prayer and praise to God, with an inexpressible tranquillity of mind, and a willingness to leave the world." Herbert truly loved church music. We are told by Izaak Walton, that "His chiefest recreation was music; in which *heavenly* Art he was a most excellent master; and did himself compose many divine hymns and anthems, which he set and sung to his lute or viol. And though he was a lover of retiredness, yet his love to music was such, that he went usually twice every week, on certain appointed days, to the cathedral church in Salisbury; and at his return would say, 'That his time spent in prayer and cathedral music, elevated

Hosted by Google

his soul, and *was his heaven upon earth.*'" Nor was he content with a mere conversational declaration of this feeling; but has given a permanent form to the feeling in a strain of pure, devotional harmony:

CHURCH MUSIC.

Sweetest of sweets, I thank you. When displeasure
Did through my body wound my mind,
You took me thence: and in your house of pleasure
A dainty lodging me assign'd.

Now I in you, without a body move,
Rising and falling with your wings.
We both together sweetly live and love,
Yet say sometimes, "God help poor kings."

Comfort, I'll die; for if you part from me,
Sure I shall do so, and much more;
But if I travel in your company,
You know the way to heaven's door.

The author of Paradise Lost, of Comus, and the Areopagitica, has left on record his admiration of church music. He was a master of the art of music, and played daily on the organ; and one of the chief traits of his glorious epic is the admirable adaptation of sound to sense, an exquisite sense of harmony and rhyme. Who can forget that rich passage in Il Penseroso, rising like "a steam of rich distilled perfumes."

But let my due feet never fail,
To walk the studious cloister's pale,
And love the high embowered roof,
With antic pillars massy proof,

Hosted by Google

And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light.
There let the pealing organ blow
To the full voic'd quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all heav'n before mine eyes.

Truly Milton, though in his creed a Puritan, or rather an Independent (of his own sort), and in his politics a Republican, was still, in his poetry, captivated by the romance and splendor of the Roman Catholic Church. Macaulay has, with great nicety hit off the distinction. "The illusions," says that brilliant declaimer, "which captivated his imagination, never impaired his reasoning powers. The statesman was proof against the splendor, the solemnity, and the romance, which enchanted the poet. Any person who will contrast the sentiments expressed in his Treatises on Prelacy, with the exquisite lines (above quoted) on Ecclesiastical Architecture and Music, in the Penseroso, which was published about the same time, will understand our meaning. This is an inconsistency which, more than anything else, raises his character in our estimation, because it shows how many private tastes and feelings he sacrificed in order to do what he considered his duty to mankind. *It is the very struggle of the noble Othello.* His heart relents; but his hand is firm. He does naught in hate, but all in honor. He kisses the beautiful deceiver before he destroys her." Four excellent witnesses, admirable as Poets and Christians, are enough to confirm the integrity of our proposition; and we have adduced the testimony of Hooker, of Donne, of Herbert, and of Milton.

Hosted by Google

Perhaps, after all, there is a nobler music than what is commonly recognised as such; we mean "the music of speech," the music of a rich, varied, and expressive elocution. Man has not been able to contrive any instrument of equal power and versatility with that natural organ bestowed upon him by his Maker. The human voice is more complicated and exquisite than the great Harlæm organ, or the finest Cremona violin. It is the mastery of art to approach nature; but here we have nature above the imitation of art. We are old-fashioned enough to love good reading, which is much rarer than good singing. We have now-a-days few Duchets (the name of the clergyman of whom Writ wrote with such enthusiasm); and it must be confessed that, to the generality of clergymen, however learned or eloquent, or amiable for private virtues, the censure of Addison still applies, which was levelled at the slovenly, careless, and irreverent performance of the most sacred duty of the priest—Prayer.

XI.

MR. BRAHAM.*

When we first heard Mr. Braham in his opening Sacred Concert at the Tabernacle, we were sadly disappointed. We thought then, as we do now, that he overlaid the majestic simplicity of sacred music with a profusion of useless and unmeaning flourishes, mere tricks of voice and execution, cadences, trills, and absurd repetitions. Wonderful power, the

* 1841.

Hosted by Google

more astonishing at his advanced age, and equally wonderful science we could not help acknowledging, but his pathos appeared labored and his enthusiasm mechanical. We did recognise a portion of the fine scorn Lamb spoke of in that magnificent piece, "Thou shalt dash them to pieces," wherein his contemptuous tones were jerked out with the same force that the fretted waves break and storm upon a rock in the raging sea. Afterwards at the theatre, on each occasion of our visits there, we were equally dissatisfied. The very indifferent acting was not relieved by any very extraordinary singing. It was the extravagance and (paradoxical, yet true) the constraint of the Italian opera. But a few evenings ago, at the Stuyvesant Institute, we at last discovered the secret of Braham's powers. It is not only the amazing extent, or clearness, or melody of his voice, nor the rapid execution, nor the brilliant expression merely, but (as in all men of true genius) it lies in the harmonious sympathy between the spirit of the man and the talent of the singer. He sang admirably, the noble heroic songs from Scott and Burns, not only because he sang with power, but also with love. He then and there sang out himself, to speak after the manner of the Germans. The honest, hearty, manly old strains, heroic or naval, or even moral, of England and Scotland, are the true songs for Braham to sing. Before we heard Braham, we fancied to our eye a sort of poetical High Priest in Israel, a majestic figure of a man uttering tones of unearthly depth and beauty, in a style austere, grand, and solemn. But Old Hundred was the only specimen of the kind Mr. Braham gave of himself to any advantage. To hear Braham in "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled," or "The Blue Bonnets are over the Border," in which his frequent animated calls sound like the acute reports of a rifle; or "The Last Words of Marmion,"

Hosted by Google

where he displays the greater variety, from great force to fine tenderness, slowness and vivacity, spirit and sentiment, we say, to hear these is to hear the finest singing that is to be heard at the present day. The rich philosophy and fine poetry of "A Man's a Man for a' that," was delivered in a proud strain, evincing the generous spirit of the singer. The hearty naval songs of old England are great favorites with Braham. He sings them with all the joyaunce of a jolly Jack Tar, that creature of impulse and heart, and with a spirit of defiance at fortune, and a manly cordiality of feeling, that smack of the children of the sea. Mere sentimental songs Mr. Braham sings badly. He has a taste and a faculty above them; he should "chaunt the old heroic ditty o'er," and leave Moore and Haynes Bayley to the lesser lights of the hour. He has force and elevation, but little of mere elegance or softness—he is the Jupiter Tonans, and not the graceful Mercurius.

XII.

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF PHILIP QUARLL.

This delightful story, the favorite of the child's library about a century ago, has now fallen into almost entire obscurity, from which we trust a late London republication of the book may revive it. It is a designed and palpable imitation of Robinson Crusoe, the popularity of which led to a swarm of imitations, amongst which the above and the Adventures of Peter Wilkins are by far the most ingenious, and so full

Hosted by Google

of freshness and invention as to deserve to pass for originals. "The Adventures of the English Hermit" were first published, in chapters, in a weekly newspaper, called the Public Intelligencer, shortly after the appearance of Robinson Crusoe, which, in like manner, had been printed in a paper with which Defoe was connected. So we see our supposed modern fashion of continuing a work of fiction through successive numbers of a periodical is by no means so original a plan as we had supposed in the hands of Hook, Dickens, Marryatt, and a host of their copyists. Our own impression had led us to believe that Launcelot Greaves, Smollett's least admirable work, was the first English novel that had appeared in the pages of a periodical, but here we have a precedent a hundred years previous. Like Peter Wilkins, and Gaudentio di Lucca, the author of Philip Quarll is unknown. One who signs himself Edward Dorrington, a *nom du plume*, we suppose, is the apparent compiler of the book; but we have, now-a-days, seen revealed all the arts of publication, and know very well that editor often means an author who palms off his own writings as the lucubrations of other people. These scanty facts we glean from the preface to the late edition, and they afford all the actual information we have been able to collect on the subject. Dunlop is entirely silent, in his history of Fiction, as to the very existence of Philip Quarll, though he mentions Peter Wilkins with praise; in which said history he has finished the department of English fiction with comparative indifference and in the briefest manner.

To confess the truth, we have ourselves only a short time since met with the Adventures, and feel that we have, by so late a reading, been deprived of the pleasant retrospections to which the perusal of a book of this sort always gives rise. There are classic works which, if not read in early childhood,

Hosted by Google

lose their principal charm, which consists of a pleasure connected with early associations, such as are peculiar in themselves, and which no other period of our life may afford us. In this class of books we place all the fairy tales and voyages *imaginaires*, as Gulliver's Travels, Robinson Crusoe, Peter Wilkins, and Philip Quarll (Gaudentio di Lucca is the single book of the kind above a mere childish imagination, but worth a text-book on ethics for the boyish youth). Pure allegory is best relished then. We read Pilgrim's Progress with constant delight before the age of ten years, but have never been able to get through five pages since; and the Holy War we give up in despair, being quite past relishing the glories of that mortal combat between the Flesh and the Devil. Oriental tales, as the Arabian Nights and Persian Tales, are very captivating to a fancy delighted with gaudy pictures, and a taste adulterated by the crudities of ignorance; so, too, for a different reason, are startling matter-of-fact relations—as the adventures of Munchausen or Baron Trenck. All of these are really beneficial to young minds; but the class of books we consider most useful for children are combinations of books of adventures and matter-of-fact relations, as Quarll's adventure, where a child is not only impressed with generous sentiments, and taught to follow a manly model of character, but also learns, and in the pleasantest manner, something of geography and of natural history. A book like this is better than a sermon or a moral lecture, for with delight it instills truth, and gives an impulse to the affections, while it stimulates the perceptions of the understanding.

To instruct children to advantage, we must charm their imaginations and touch their hearts; through these avenues we excite the natural piety instinct in the most fallible of

Hosted by Google

human creatures, and awaken the dormant love of virtue, which (and not that accursed doctrine of natural depravity), is the true birthright of man. By these means, too, we invigorate and enlighten the reason, the master faculty, and thus in effect gain far more, and in a more pleasing manner, than if we had gone directly to work, and frightened or stupified our little pupils into the practice of a decorous behavior and the acquisition of the mere signs of knowledge. We are sorry to see the present race of writers of books for children adopting the unwise course of pragmatically insisting upon a didactic manner in works of fiction. In the midst of all the cants of the day, we are in danger of being surfeited with the cant of useful knowledge, and the cant of human perfectibility. Certainly all knowledge (even of the worst sort) has its uses; but for the love of variety, my masters, let us have a little (so called) *useless* knowledge. It will at least serve as a relief to the mind; and of goodness, though we cannot have too much, we beg there may be less talking and more performance. We did not wonder that Harriet Martineau could bore children with tirades upon frugality and the circle of domestic virtues, but we are sorry to see even Miss Sedgwick and charming Mary Howitt getting to be too moral by half; and, to crown our surprise, Captain Marryatt is overriding the useful knowledge hobby at such a pace, that we fear he will soon be found floundering in the dirt. In the midst of all this, we are gratified to bring into notice an old work with a new interest, to present our juvenile acquaintance with a new treasure to their former literary store, an accession they will not readily renounce.

Our first acquaintance with Philip Quarll arose out of the encomiums we met upon it in two or three passages of Leigh Hunt's writings, and the favor with which it was received by

Hosted by Google

that glorious circle which met at Lamb's Wednesday evening parties. What fascinated three generations of children might, we logically inferred, attract a fourth ; and so we took up the work with the intention of saying something about it, if we were so fortunate as to catch the spirit of it. This intention was confirmed and excused (for we foolishly enough imagined the readers of the Boston Miscellany might consider a notice of an old child's book too trifling for their regard), by the article of Hunt* on Peter Wilkins, a work of similar character, and of which we have something to say before we stop. Of Philip Quarll, beyond a couple of sentences or so, we have seen a criticism nowhere, and have the ground, a virgin soil, entirely to ourselves.

Let us premise that in our critical capacity we write to the parents ; genius alone can write up to the purity of the innocent child. We may have our say, and talk learnedly enough, but it is Mr. Hawthorne who can present his Fancy's Show-box, and fix the roving eye of childhood as by a magic spell. As we love children, however, we shall be glad to act even as subordinate to their best teachers, the father and mother, they to whom they owe life and the fostering care of it, gratitude inferior only to that we all owe to the Father of our fathers, and the merciful protector of their offspring.

To make an end of what seems to be getting interminable, we come at once to our new acquaintance. The Adventures of Philip Quarll are prefaced by a long and very agreeable account of the discovery of the same Philip Quarll, by the aforesaid Mr. Dorrington. Our present notice might be entitled a discovery of the discovery of Philip Quarll, to which is added the adventures, &c. Mr. Dorrington, we are told,

* The Seer, xxxi., Part First.

Hosted by Google

was a British merchant, who on his return to England from a voyage of mercantile adventure, by accident made the discovery of an island in the South Sea, which had been supposed uninhabited, and even unapproachable for landing, on account of the difficulties of access to it; but on which was found an English hermit, who had lived there solitary and alone (as Mr. Benton might add), not only conveniently, and with comfort, but perfectly resigned and happy, for the space of fifty years. The account of the discovery includes a description of the dress, habitation and utensils of Quarll, and a long report of the conversation held with him. Of the dress, manner of life, &c., we will only remark a close similarity to the minuteness and particularity of the descriptions and narrative of Robinson Crusoe. This, and the internal evidence of the story, and its conduct, induces us to suspect Defoe himself of the authorship of the book; a supposition highly probable, when we consider the demand for that class of writings, excited by the Crusoe of the same author, his wonderful copiousness, and his natural desire to enhance the value of the first book, by an imitation of it. This is a mere supposition of our own; yet analogous circumstances, a repetition of incidents even, lead us to suspect that by chance we may have hit upon the real author. The very concealment of the author's name might be employed as an argument on our side of the question. Defoe had nothing to gain after writing Robinson Crusoe, by copying himself; and then the similarity is so strong in all points, down to the very homeliness, and yet expressiveness of the style, that we cannot think it a mere copy, since, at the same time, it discovers so much internal force and naturalness, which a mere copyist would not be likely to possess. Be that as it may, Quarll is Crusoe slightly altered. He is older, naturally more devout,

Hosted by Google

and a greater lover of solitude; but equally a lover of animals and of nature, equally expert as a mechanic and planter; like Robinson Crusoe, cast by a shipwreck on a desert island, like him recovering the most necessary articles from the wreck. There are a few points of dissimilarity. Crusoe is transported at the thought of returning home, while Quarll will not leave his beloved retreat. The former hermit is continually in dread of the Anthropophagi, while the latter is only once visited by two thievish Indians, who fly at his approach. Quarll has no man Friday, but a favorite monkey, Beaufidelle. The coincidences are much more numerous; Quarll finds a turtle, like Crusoe, turns it on its back to keep it, uses the shell for a dish and a kettle combined, preserves his fresh fish, flesh, and fowl, in the salt water. His building, and furnishing, are of a piece with Robinson Crusoe's; so too his daily rounds, his devotional exercises. These last were somewhat particular; Quarll was a man of a religious turn, never forgot to ask a blessing, return thanks at his meals, nor his daily devotions. His evening exercises are picturesquely described; he regularly resorted to a place where echoes were wonderfully multiplied and prolonged, and being gifted with a noble voice, which had been highly cultivated, he filled the valley or cavern with a thousand melodious airs. In this book, as in its prototype, we find the same ceaseless requisitions and provisions for the appetite. Quarll is always getting in his fish and chestnuts, and pickling his mushrooms, and entrapping a hare or a duck. We get a little tired of this, when reading on a full stomach, or in a large town; but on a deserted island the three meals must be the chief objects of worldly thoughts. Quarll's monkeys play an important part in the narrative, and fill a large place in his benevolent affections. His long beard is as

Hosted by Google

characteristic as Robinson's fur cap, which made us regard him as a grenadier, in our childish days: the old man, though eighty-eight when discovered, could sneeze like a man of thirty: had a powerful voice, and an uncommonly vigorous frame. He was almost a giant in his muscular power, yet mild as an humble Christian. The only defects about Quarll are those of clothing: from his waist up he is naked; he has no sort of covering for his head, and his feet are bare of shoes and stockings. We think the author ought to have furnished him, at least, with an umbrella, and a pair of buckskin slippers; he might have sent them ashore on a wave from the wreck, or have prevailed on the voyagers to leave them for future use. As it is, our venerable friend looks as if a severe winter would give him a bad cold, from wet feet, and in summer there was imminent danger of a sun stroke. To leave this trifling, and add to the force of our former argument, we annex a short passage from an account of Mr. Dorrington's voyage home, which is as like Defoe's style as Moll Flanders is like the History of the Plague, in point of manner, or as any one work of the same author is like any other:

"Having refreshed ourselves very well on this island (Juan Fernandez), we resolved to steer for Cape Verde in Chili. On the 12th we made the island of St. Jago, where we anchored, and sent our boat ashore. Here we bought some hogs and black cattle for our voyage round Cape Horn to the Brazils, as also some corn and maize.

"We weighed anchor on the 20th, and sailed from hence round Cape Horn. Round the Cape the weather favored us extremely; and nothing happened that was material, only that we were chased by a pirate ship, for about twelve hours on the 29th; but the night coming on, it favored us, so that

Hosted by Google

we lost her. On the 4th of September we made Falkland's Islands, and Cape St. Antonio, near the mouth of the River de la Plata, in Paraguay, on the 25th; when we stood out to sea, and made the island of Grande, on the coast of Brazil, on the 29th. We have received a letter from our owners, commanding us home, and not to sail for New England, as designed. Here we got beef, mutton, hogs, fowls, sugar, rum, oranges, and lemons, so that now we did not want for good punch."

Does not this read like a page out of a veritable log-book from the hand of Daniel Defoe?

The account of Quarll is written in the third person, instead of being an autobiography. For this reason we conceive that it loses a portion of its spirit. It is a work no less curious than interesting, and contains much valuable matter of a miscellaneous character. It is interspersed with judicious reflection, and enlivened by agreeable pictures. It relates singular facts. It is withal highly characteristic of the subject of it, and full of a personal interest. To confirm this criticism, we must not delay giving the reader specimens under each head. Previously to doing this we will extract a longer passage than the preceding, to give the reader a better taste of our author's general manner. It is all over Defoe. It relates a passage in the solitary existence of Quarll:

"About forty paces farther he found a chest in a cleft of the rock, which had been washed up there by the violence of the storm. After thanking heaven for its mercy in sending this gift, he tried to lift it, but could not; he was therefore obliged to fetch his hatchet to break it open, that he might take away what was in it by degrees. Having taken as much of the sail cloth as he could conveniently carry, with the few oysters he had got, he went home and fetched the

Hosted by Google

tool, wrenched open the chest, from which he took a suit of clothes and some fine linen. 'These,' said he, 'neither the owner nor I want;' so laid them down. The next thing he took out was a roll of parchment, being blank indentures and leases; 'there,' said he, 'are instruments of law, and are often applied to injustice; but I'll alter their mischievous properties, and make them records of Heaven's mercies, and Providence's wonderful liberality to me; instead of being the ruin of some, they may chance to be the reclaiming of others.' At the bottom of the chest lay a runlet of brandy, a Cheshire cheese, a leather bottle full of ink, with a parcel of pens, ink, and a penknife; 'as for these,' said he, 'they are of use; the pens, ink, and parchment, have equipped me to keep a journal, which will divert and pass away a few anxious hours. By degrees he took home the chest and its contents; and now having materials to begin his journal, he immediately fell to work; that for want of other books, he might at his leisure peruse his past transactions, and the many mercies he had received from heaven; and that after his decease whoever might be directed hither by Providence, upon reading his wonderful escapes in the greatest of dangers, his miraculous living when remote from human assistance, in the like extremity he should not despair. Thus he began from his being eight years old, to the day of his being cast away, being then twenty-eight years of age, resolving to continue it to his death."

It can hardly be expected that we should attempt the barest outline of incidents in a magazine article. We can only touch a few points in a very cursory manner.

The hero of the adventures is a philosopher by nature and from circumstances: he has got a habit of reflection, and is perpetually moralizing on the most familiar aspects of nature,

Hosted by Google

and the most ordinary occurrences of life. Thus, walking along the sea shore, he perceives at the foot of a rock, "an extraordinary large whale, which, cast there by the late high wind, had died for want of water. There were shoals of small fishes swimming about it in the shallow water wherein it lay as rejoicing at its death." Upon this he remarks, "Thus the oppressed rejoice at a tyrant's fall. Well, happy are they who, like me, are under heaven's government only." He then with his knife cut several slices of the whale and threw them to the small fishes, saying, "It is just ye should, at last, feed on that which so long fed on you;" a homily which admits of a political construction. Here recurs another instance of his philosophic turn. "One day, having walked the island over and over, he proceeded to view the sea, whose fluid element being ever in motion, affords new objects of admiration. The day being very fair, and the weather as calm, he sat down upon the rock, taking pleasure in seeing the waves roll, and, as it were, chase one another; the second pursuing the first, and being itself overtaken by a succeeding, until they sunk altogether. 'This,' said he, 'is a true emblem of ambition; men striving to outdo one another are often undone.'"

As he was making reflections on the emptiness of vanity and pride, and returning thanks to heaven that he was separated from the world, which abounds in nothing so much, a ship appeared at a great distance, a sight he had not seen since his shipwreck. "Most unlucky invention, said he, "that ever came into a man's thoughts. The ark, which gave the first notion of a floating habitation, was ordered for the preservation of man; but its fatal copies daily expose him to destruction." Notwithstanding his philosophy, Quarll is thrown into deep distress by the failure of an attempt to reach the is-

Hosted by Google

land, on the part of the sailors. This was, however, brief.

Again, he misses an opportunity of escape. On a third occasion, an endeavor is made to carry him off by force, for exhibition. This was unsuccessful. A fourth chance of release is repulsed by him, having determined to spend the remnant of his life in his (now) beloved retreat.

Our hermit has a lively talent for coloring, an agreeable, descriptive fancy. The following present a few examples:

Antelopes. "Having a majestic presence, body and limbs representing a stag, and the noble march of a horse."

A beautiful unknown bird. "He contemplated with delight on the inexpressible beauty of the feathers, which on the back were after the nature of a drake's, every one distinguished from the other by a rim round the edge, about the breadth of a large thread, and being of a changeable color, from red to aurora and green; the ribs were of a delightful blue, and the feathers pearl-color, speckled with a bright yellow; the breast and belly, if they might be said to be of any particular color, were that of dove's feathers, rimmed like the back, diversely changing; the head, which was like that of a swan for make, was purple, changing as if moved; the bill like burnished gold; the eyes like a ruby, with a rim of gold around them; the feet the same as the bill; the size of the bird was between that of a middling goose and a duck, and in shape it somewhat resembled a swan."

Can this be a veritable picture or a fanciful extravagance? A little farther on is the description of a bird somewhat similar, but still more gorgeous in its plumage.

The sea monster he paints a horrible creature, and with the Gorgon terrors of Behemoth himself. It is evidently an imaginary phantasm. "A form without likeness, and yet comparable to the most terrible part of every frightful creature; a

Hosted by Google

large head, resembling that of a lion, bearing three pair of horns; one pair upright, like that of an antelope, another pair like wild goats', two more bending backwards; its face armed all round with darts, like a porcupine; with great eyes sparkling like a flint struck with a steel; its nose like a wild horse, always snarling; the mouth of a lion and teeth of a panther, the jaws of an elephant, and the tusks of a wild boar, shouldered like a giant, with claws like an eagle, bodied and covered with shells like a rhinoceros, and the color of a crocodile." In this fertile region, Quarll meets with numberless instances of the prodigality of nature; the rarest fruits, fowls, and fishes; forests of beautiful trees, sometimes of miraculous size, one covered with its branches a whole acre; while another grew for the same extent, so closely interwoven in its branches, which seemed almost to spring from the roots, as to form an impenetrable barrier, a sort of natural picket or palisade. Monkeys were the hermit's pets, and he would sometimes excite a quarrel between two varieties, the green and grey species, to induce reflections on the folly of brawling and fighting. For invariably a third party came in and stole away the spoils for which they were contending.

A pleasant instance of our hermit's loyalty is mentioned in the introduction to the adventures by the compilers of them, in whose hands Quarll left his MSS.; which, at the same time, fixes the general date of the work. At the repast given by the old man to Dorrington, the health of George III. was drunk; and an eulogium passed upon his character, to which some dissenting criticism might be offered.

We have now endeavored to give the reader a general idea of Philip Quarll's adventures, but trust he will speedily consult that history itself to verify our conjectures in part, but more particularly for the amusement and profit of an entire perusal.

Hosted by Google

Peter Wilkins we can hardly pretend to write upon after Hunt. But we may retain a remembrance, and hazard a conjecture. It was our first play (the story dramatized) and hence can by no possibility be forgotten, as such an occasion forms an epoch in the life of every individual. We cannot think the author of Philip Quarll and Peter Wilkins are one and the same person, for with a great similarity, an element entirely original is introduced into the latter, the author of which displays a more copious invention and a more spiritual fancy than the author of the first work. Both are admirable of their kind, a class now quite extinct, and to the re-production of which, our present race of story-tellers appear quite inadequate from a want of faith, a want of invention, a want of simplicity, and a want of exact truth and fidelity of imagination.

XIII.

WALTON'S LIVES.

"There are no colors in the fairest sky
So fair as these. The feather whence the pen
Was shaped that traced the lives of these good men,
Dropped from an Angel's wing. With moistened eye
We read of faith and purest Charity
In Statesman, Priest, and humble citizen;
O could we copy their mild virtues, then
What joy to live, what blessedness to die!
Methinks their very names shine still and bright;
Apart, like glow-worms on a summer night,

Hosted by Google

> Or lonely tapers when from far they fling
> A guiding ray; or seen, like stars on high,
> Satellites burning in a lucid ring
> Around meek Walton's heavenly memory."
>
> WORDSWORTH.

IN the whole circle of English literature, a volume more unique and attractive to the best class of readers cannot easily be found, than the Lives of Walton. The most enthusiastic praises of the acutest critics have conferred an enviable immortality on their admirable author, which, added to the sweet and manly character of Honest Izaak, have united to give his book a place on the shelf above that of many writers of greater reputation and more brilliant genius. On a work of such excellence and so well known, we shall not now dwell with more particularity.

Our object at present will be, to consider the principal features common to the Lives, and the personal as well as literary character of Walton *himself*. A certain family likeness exists between all the different heroes of Walton, and a similar mode of handling the relation of their lives. Thus all of them—Donne, Wotton, Herbert, Hooker, Sanderson —were remarkable for their early studies as well as precocity of genius: each was a liberal scholar and devoted to his calling: each was a firm and zealous churchman: all of them but Wotton were divines, and he was a sort of lay preacher: they were all most fortune in their deaths, regular and happy in their lives, even Hooker, notwithstanding his domestic trials. In their tempers and dispositions, they were men of great mildness and moderation: of a charitable turn, given to hospitality and the company of their friends, liberal thinkers, inclined to innocent pleasantry, utterly devoid of cunning or deceit, sincere Christians and unpretending philanthropists.

Hosted by Google

Yet with all these points in common, each was possessed of a marked individuality of character and genius. Though both of them poets, and fine poets, the sentiment of Herbert is quite different from the fancy of Donne, and that again from the reflection of Wotton. Hooker and Sanderson, able on the same topics, displayed talents quite diverse; the one being more of a general philosophical inquirer, the other more of a theoretical casuist. There can be no stronger argument for the purity and innocence of Walton's life, than the fact that these were his personal friends—companions of his choice, who thought it no want of dignity in them to associate with the simple-hearted author of the Complete Angler. The Lives are written with considerable minuteness, and are yet very general, minute in particular instances, but general in the main outlines. They uniformly commence with an apology for his unfitness for the task of historical narrative, and excuses for the defects of style and manner. This was not, in all probability, an affectation, but real diffidence.

The youth and prime of Walton having been passed in the pursuit of trade and commerce, his education had been of a very miscellaneous character, picked up from desultory reading and the conversation of the divines with whom he was a great favorite, and of whom he was a decided admirer. Commencing authorship, too, late in life, he felt the clogs of business and the want of freedom in his ideas and composition. This he soon attained, and if his style never became perfect, yet it was original of its kind, and such as no art of rhetoric could teach.

Prefixed to the Lives is a biography of Walton, by Dr. Zouch, the same who wrote the life of Sir Philip Sidney. He has made a better preface of the first, than his stupid volume on the latter personage, though his passing criticisms

Hosted by Google

on Donne and Fuller smack of the trained critic of the formal French school of criticism of the eighteenth century.

The profession of Walton is known to have been that of a wholesale linen-draper or Hamburgh merchant. His first initiation into trade is thought to have been in one of the shops where, in company with other industrious young men, he was placed by the munificence of Sir Thomas Gresham (the English Medici, and founder of the Royal Exchange), who had erected several in the upper part of his celebrated building. After a course of prudent management, of frugality and assiduous labor, Walton, at the age of fifty years, retired from business, resolving to spend the rest of his years in the practice of his social and religious duties, and to cultivate his powers by reading, conversation and reflection. A moderate independency satisfied the simple desires of this contented Christian philosopher, and he was too wise a man not to leave the turmoil of business as soon as his circumstances warranted the removal. Unlike our modern money-seekers, he preferred ease and a quiet conscience to extravagance and display, and the laborious tasks requisite to meet large demands. Immediately on leaving trade, he turned author, and he affords one example more of the good writers who have arisen, not from the peasantry alone (which class boasts a Burns, a Hogg, and a Bloomfield), but from the middling classes of society, as Richardson the novelist, who was a printer; Defoe, a hosier; and even lower, Ben Jonson, a bricklayer, and Dodsley, a footman, who became a writer and publisher. We think we can perceive the effects of his business habits in the writings of Walton, in his method and accuracy, which it is becoming the fashion to impeach, his speciality, and honest dealing.

The literary character of Walton is distinguished by the

Hosted by Google

same sincerity and pure feeling that mark his personal disposition. Good sense, a reverence for the wise and good, a natural piety, and unfeigned simplicity, are the principal characteristics of the author as well as of the man. His garrulity (in some cases the effect of age, he wrote the life of Sanderson in his eighty-fifth year,) is the innocent, free talk of a familiar friend; yet it must be confessed this inclination to gossip and to accept reports and traditions as true history, has led him, in some cases, to statements that have been charged with being one-sided and partial.

Beside those features of his personal character already mentioned, one occurs, and exceedingly prominent, his loyalty. This feeling grew out of his natural reverence for authority and superiors. He was also a zealous churchman for the same reason, and warmly opposed the covenant—and for this he suffered considerably in his temporal affairs, as well as in the trials to which his mild temper was subjected. A fast friend to royalty and the church, circumstances, as well as his natural bent, led him to embrace that particular side. His mother was the niece of Archbishop Cranmer, and his wife the sister of Bishop Ken, who has written some fine hymns, and whom James II. reckoned the first among the Protestant preachers of his time.

The divines of that day, with whom Walton was intimately associated, greatly influenced his mind and character, and may be said, by their works and conversation, to have formed his mind and leading opinions—Donne, Herbert, Sanderson, Fuller, Ken, King, Usher, Chillingworth, and three poets, at that period the natural defenders of monarchy and nobility, Drayton, Shirley, the dramatist, and Chalkhill.

From the multitude of eulogiums and affectionate allusions to Walton, living, and his memory after death, we have se-

Hosted by Google

lected the following nervous lines of Flatman, a forgotten poet, who has shown genius in two or three short pieces.

> Happy old man! whose worth all mankind knows,
> Except himself; who charitably shows
> The ready road to virtue and to praise,
> The road to many long and happy days,
> The noble acts of generous piety,
>
> And how to compass true felicity.
> Hence did he learn the art of living well;
> The bright Thealma was his oracle:
> Inspired by her he knows no anxious cares,
> Through near a century of pleasant years;
> Easy he lives and cheerful shall he die,
> Well spoken of by late posterity.

How correctly the poet has prophesied, the readers and admirers of Walton at the present day may answer. The name occurs but once beside in our own literature, and then in a work of fiction, the enchanting volume of Mackenzie; and apart from the melancholy sentiment and pathetic sweetness of that character, it is a magic name, consecrated to the respect of all scholars, and the love of all good men throughout the world.

XXIX.

ELIJAH FENTON.

In a former article, on Religious Biography, the very imperfect list of English biographies that rank as classic productions in that department of writing there inserted, includes

Hosted by Google

the lives of Milton and Waller, by Fenton, an author so estimable as a man, and affording so agreeable an instance of one class of writers, that, although little known himself, and author of no very important efforts, we are inclined to pause at his name, and sketch his personal and literary character. Fenton was emphatically a man of letters, a title of dubious meaning, and that ought to have a settled character. In its most enlarged sense, it may convey the idea of a general scholar and miscellaneous author, as the term lawyer, in this country, includes every department in the profession, uniting the contrary pursuits of barrister, special pleader, conveyancer, and equity draughtsman, which in England are separately followed as distinct professions. Or it may be taken in the the sense of D'Israeli, as that body of readers and students standing between the great body of authors and the larger body of mere readers; aiding the first as critics, or by counsel and research, or else acting the part of interpreters or commentators for the last. The very highest order of genius are above this class, and also the first class, of men of talent. A poet almost inspired, yet comparatively unlettered, as Burns or Elliott, is not called a man of letters, since not a book-man or scholar. Yet he may be much superior to the mere scholar. Neither is the true man of letters purely a student, but also an author. He is not often a voluminous author, unless he is poor, for the delicacy of his taste will curb the facility of production, and give the last finish to his style. If obliged to live by his pen, he will write much, but miscellaneously, as Hazlitt and Hunt. It is not likely he will ever attempt a long work, for, if blessed with a competence, he will be too indolent, and, if pressed to write often, he cannot write at length. There are, then, two distinct divisions of the class. Gray and Warton, and, we may add, Fenton,

Hosted by Google

were representatives of the first, and the miscellaneous authors, by profession, of the present and past age, of the last, as Goldsmith, Johnson, Cumberland, Southey, the regular reviewers and critics, and the ablest modern lecturers, Guizot, Cousin, Carlyle, etc. Fenton, though poor, was almost always attached to some great man or wealthy patron, who was glad to exchange a moderate pension for the pleasure of his society and conversation, and, at least, for the latter part of his life, though his circumstances were narrow, yet he was placed above want and the importunate calls of necessity. He could write or read, as he pleased, and he cared to do little else. "He is," says Pope,* "a right honest man and a good scholar: he sits within and does nothing but read and compose." This is the true picture. Mere amateurs of authorship, petty (occasional) scribblers, or deliverers of an annual address or a quarterly lecture; collectors of rare rhymes, they have not the taste to read or capacity to comprehend; gentlemanly, fashionable smatterers of learning; rich patrons, may call themselves "literary characters," or "men of letters," but it is not their proper designation; they are more worthily styled pretenders, shallow coxcombs, arrogant fools. We have met with more than one character of this sort. They are generally on lecture committees, or appointed as corresponding secretaries to literary societies. They haunt public libraries and reading-rooms. Their names are in all the newspapers. These are pretenders, with full pockets. A more unfortunate pretender, is a poor author—one destitute in a pecuniary view, who takes up the trade of authorship without the means or abilities to carry it on. Such a person might as well profess alchemy as literature. We are willing to take the experience of the best judges, when we conclude

* Spence.

Hosted by Google

that a good scholar and able writer, if not unfortunate in other respects, must eventually succeed in obtaining a respectable livelihood, as well as the lawyer or physician, above whom he unquestionably ranks. For he works with the finest tools, on the most exalted and purifying materials. Never let him forget the sentence of a master of authorship.* "*Such a superiority do the pursuits of literature possess above every other occupation, that even he who attains but a mediocrity in them, merits the pre-eminence above those that excel the most in the common and vulgar professions.*" Of the gentility of literature, as a pursuit (not to say of its noble aristocracy), a paper might be written, demonstrating conclusively its generous scope and noble elevation; but we believe we have pursued the subject sufficiently for the present.

Of the works of Fenton, a brief criticism may serve. His prose is sweet and elegant: his poetry pleasing, but verging towards feebleness. In the high sense, he was no poet, but only an agreeable versifier. His lives are agreeable abridgments of what a common writer would have swelled into books of twelve times the size; but as a miscellaneous scholar, and chiefly a classical scholar, was he reputed to rank high. He translated for Pope the first, fourth, nineteenth, and twentieth books of the Odyssey; and so smoothly, that they are not generally distinguished from those of Pope's translation.—He was often engaged as private tutor—for a time he was secretary to the Earl of Orrery, in Flanders, and tutor to his son, who ever afterwards mentioned him with esteem and tenderness. He was at one time assistant in a school, and afterwards kept a school for himself. Bolingbroke persuaded him to give this up, for more honorable employment (as it was thought), and court favor. Pope stood by

* Hume.

Hosted by Google

him under all circumstances, and procured him an enviable situation as instructor and companion to Secretary Craggs, who died too soon for the successful prosecution of the scheme. With Southerne, the dramatic poet, Fenton preserved a close intimacy. At his house he wrote his tragedy of Mariamne, which brought its author one thousand pounds. The widow of Sir William Trumbull, at Pope's recommendation (who loved to make his friends happy), invited Fenton to educate her son, whom he accompanied to Cambridge. Fenton died at the seat of this excellent woman, in the capacity of auditor of her accounts—a species of gentleman-steward and agent. Pope wrote his epitaph, a monument of his taste and affection.

The personal character of Fenton was delightful—a temper sweet, yet not insipid; a judgment manly and liberal; a taste refined, but not fastidious; a talent for conversation, lively, entertaining and instructive; integrity of the purest dye; the gentlest consideration;—these were the peculiar characteristics of one of the noblest of human creatures. "None knew him but to praise." His merits have softened the severity of Johnson, and disarmed the satire of Pope. For the brevity of his life, Johnson apologizes; he says, "it is not the effect of indifference or negligence." Fenton was a non-jurer, and hence "a commoner of Nature;"* but, though friendless and poor (in his early career), his biographer adds, "he kept his name unsullied, and never suffered himself to be reduced, like too many of the same sect, to mean arts and dishonorable shifts. Whoever mentioned Fenton, mentioned him with honor." In the lives of Milton and Waller, Johnson refers with respect and eulogy to our author; and in the life of Pope he repeats his former praises—"The character of Fenton

* Johnson.

Hosted by Google

was so amiable, that I cannot forbear to wish for some poet or biographer to display it more fully for the advantage of posterity. If he did not stand in the first rank of genius, he may claim a place in the second; and, whatever criticism may object to his writings, censure could find very little to blame in his life." No man may, with truth, assail Johnson for want of heart; he had, in fact, a truly humane disposition. Eulogy of a man from whom he could expect nothing if living, and to whom, dead, he owed no debt of gratitude, bespeaks a generous nature. The only defect in Fenton (a *most venial fault in him*, though not in others) was a physical indolence, the effect of constitutional debility. He was tall and corpulent, sluggish, a late riser, and took little exercise. An attendant, where he once lodged, used to say he would "lie a-bed and be fed with a spoon." Pope said he died of indolence; but his distemper was the fruit of physical indolence—the gout. A story is told much to his credit, that we ought not to omit repeating:—"At an entertainment, made for the family by his elder brother, he observed that one of his sisters, who had married unfortunately, was absent; and found, upon inquiry, that distress had made her thought unworthy of invitation. As she was at no great distance, he refused to sit at the table till she was called, and when she had taken her place was careful to show her particular attention."

Such was Elijah Fenton, a man who exhibited, in a private scene, and on a limited stage, the virtues of the philosopher and of the Christian hero; evincing, in his patient forbearance, his firm integrity and honorable poverty, a resolution and high tone of principle, that more ennobles human nature than the dazzling victories and gaudy triumphs of the conqueror. This excellent man had the tastes, the habits, the

Hosted by Google

acquisitions, the pure aspirations of the genuine scholar, united to the calmness, the sagacity and moderation of the philosopher. A better tribute to his memory than a polished and epigrammatic epitaph, may be read in the following letter of Pope to the Rev. Mr. Broome, the mutual friend of Pope and Fenton, and their associate in the translation of the Odyssey. We annex it entire, with the complete details:

"To the Rev. Mr. Broome,
"At Pulham, near Harlestone, Nor.,
"[By Beccles, Bag.] Suffolke.

"Dear Sir,—I intended to write to you on this melancholy subject, the death of Mr. Fenton, before yrs came; but stay'd to have informed myself and you of ye circumstances of it. All I hear is, that he felt a gradual decay, tho' so early in life, & was declining for 5 or 6 months. It was not as I apprehended, the gout in his stomach, but I believe rather a complication first of gross humors, as he was naturally corpulent, not discharging themselves, as he used no sort of exercise. No man better bore ye approaches of his dissolution (as I am told) or with less ostentation yielded up his Being. The great modesty which you know was natural to him, and ye great contempt he had for all sorts of vanity and Parade, never appeared more than in his last moments; he had a conscious satisfaction (no doubt) in acting right, and feeling himself honest, true, and unpretending to more than was his own. So he dyed, as he lived, with that secret, yet sufficient, contentment.

"As to any papers left behind him, I dare say they can be but few; for this reason, he never wrote out of vanity, or thought much of the applause of men. I know one instance where he did his utmost to conceal his own merit that way;

Hosted by Google

and if we join to this his natural love of ease, I fancy we must expect little of this sort; at least I hear of none except some few further remarks on Waller (which his cautious integrity made him leave an order to be given to Mr. Tonson), and perhaps, though 'tis many years since I saw it, a Translation of ye first Book of Oppian. He had begun a tragedy of Dion, but made small progress in it.

"As to his other affairs, he dyed poor, but honest, leaving no debts or legacies; except of a few pounds to Mr. Trumbull and my Lady, in token of respect, gratefulness, and mutual esteem.

"I shall, with pleasure, take upon me to draw this amiable, quiet, deserving, unpretending Christian and philosophical character, in his epitaph. There truth may be spoken in a few words: as for Flourish, and Oratory, and Poetry, I leave them to younger and more lively writers, such as love writing for writing sake, and wd rather shew their own Fine Parts, yn report the valuable ones of any other man. So the Elegy I renounce.

"I condole with you from my heart on the loss of so worthy a man, and a Friend to us both. Now he is gone, I must tell you he has done you many a good office, and set your character in ye fairest light to some who either mistook you, or know you not. I doubt not he has done the same for me.

"Adieu: Let us love his memory, and profit by his example—I am, very sincerely,

"Dr Sir,

"Your affectionate & real servant,

"A. Pope.

"Aug. 29, 1730."

Hosted by Google

Thus wrote, not the just censor, the keen satirist, the brilliant moral painter, the gay, elegant, courtly letter-writer, the arch critic of the artificial school of poetry and of criticism ; but the humane, the affectionate, the friendly Pope, out of his very heart of hearts, with earnestness and undoubted zeal. To question the truth of this were to insult humanity.

XV.

SWEDENBORGIANISM.*

We have here two accredited expositions of the character and tenets of the Swedenborgian sect, by respectable clergymen of that denomination ; and, in order to satisfy the minds of those inquiring into the truth and genuineness of these doctrines, in ever so slight a degree, we shall present a brief abstract of them ; but first, it may be necessary to lay before the reader some account of that extraordinary man, Emmanuel Swedenborg ; for such, all who study his life and system must allow him to have been, however they may refuse to admit his apostolical or prophetic character.

Swedenborg was the son of a Lutheran bishop, and educated with, perhaps, something of sectarian rigor. We conceive we see, in this fact, an explanation of those visionary theories, and that "largest liberty," which occupied the

* "A Course of five Lectures on the fundamental Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church," by Richard De Charms. 92 pp., 12mo., Philadelphia. "Barrett's Lectures," 12mo. John Allen.

Hosted by Google

thoughts of his latter years. From a restricted bigotry to unbounded freedom of belief, the transition is neither uncommon nor unnatural. Yet, true to his early education, Swedenborg never left the communion of the Lutheran Church, but remained a member to the day of his death. Many of his sentiments, of a nobler morality, and much of the spiritual interpretation, which he vulgarized by its too frequent use, might safely be introduced into every sect, and into the bosom even of the true Church; but then, purely in an episodical manner, and not as the only saving truth. Though writing and teaching as "a man sent down from the Lord," yet it is not until after his death that his followers united together to form, what they assumed to style (with sufficient humility to be sure) *The New Church*. Sectarian arrogance and spiritual conceit have rarely transcended this.

Swedenborg was early distinguished for quickness, industry, memory and enthusiasm. He had a rich, luxuriant fancy, and some poetical talent. He was a chemist, linguist, and mathematician: understood metallurgy and anatomy, and possessed an inventive spirit, and an original vein, in all of these. He was more than this, a clear, exact, methodical man of business; drew up the best financial reports, succeeded in embassies, and made himself a useful statesman. Altogether, he was a man of rare natural abilities, with much and various culture. He filled numerous offices of high trust, was ennobled and honored with distinguished attentions; at one time the favorite of Charles XII.; and, if we are not in error, he converted a later sovereign to his peculiar views. Swedenborg, from all accounts, must have been an honest man, a pure man, a sincere Christian, but a religious enthusiast; and, as we cannot help thinking, possessed with a monomania, not fierce and turbulent, but gentle and spiritual. It has been

Hosted by Google

said, that the study of the Book of Revelations would turn any man's head who attempts to translate that mystical allegory into plain prose. Newton (says a great authority) wrote nonsense on the Revelations. Wise Dan Chaucer, long since, told his readers that

> The greatest clerks are not the wisest men.

And Swedenborg adds another illustrious name to the list of those who attempt impossible things; ranking, with the inquirers after the longitude, those who seek to square the circle, or discover perpetual motion. It were as wise to hunt after the art of transmuting the baser metals into gold, as to aim at a new (and true, at the same time) commentary on the Christian scheme and the Holy Scriptures. From one of the best accounts of the life of Swedenborg, in the Encyclopædia Americana, to which our attention has been directed by a Swedenborgian, we adopt a conclusion of the critic, that Swedenborg was rather a religious poet than a scientific theologian: that, though a man of a truly devotional spirit, he had more of fancy in his piety and his so-called visions, than he himself imagined. His country, his temperament, his very name smacks of mysticism. His followers deny this: but we want no other proof of it, than some of his own pretentions, and the titles of some of his works.* What man but he, save Quevedo in satire, and Virgil, with Dante and Milton, in epic poesy, ever pretended a picture of Hell? Swedenborg gives, also, a minute description of Heaven and the Angelic Spirits. We have heard the Swedish Apostle compared to Jacob Boehmen, and we suspect a close parallel: it is said that the former was obliged to the earlier mystic, for many ideas and images. Even Emerson, very lately,

* Arcana Celestia, the Apocalypse, and Angelic Wisdom.

Hosted by Google

spoke of Swedenborg as the greatest poet since Dante, thereby greatly alloying his prophetic character. For the introduction of fancy into religion leaves too much room for the exercise of human invention. A poetical religionist is likely to be an unsafe biblical critic. We see this exemplified in the strange mixture of ancient Christianity and Neo-Platonism, where the distinctive doctrines of each were so confused as to impair the verisimilitude of the former, and give too high authority to the visions of the latter. This grew to so great an evil, that after the separation of the two diverse elements, the doctrine of the Trinity itself, the very corner-stone of Christianity, came to be considered, by some, a relic of Platonism. The prophets of old spake from a celestial inspiration; the impostors of modern days (we do not rank Swedenborg among conscious impostors), the Mother Ann Lees, of the Shakers; the Joe Smiths, of the Mormons, etc., seek the light of their own unenlightened reason, and the vain boastings of a copious, but ill-regulated fancy. The Apostles of old were, most of them, plain, unlettered men. Modern pseudo-apostles are men of some acquirements, and a ready invention. To make a genuine Christian disciple, Faith and Love only are wanting (both, how rare!); but, to make a fashionable and popular vulgar saint, some vigour of character and physical constitution is necessary; but more of a dazzling showy species of talent, with a vast fund of impudence and imperturbable self-reliance. We believe Swedenborg to have been a good man, in most respects; and in some particulars, a great man; but like many men, both great and good, he was vain, or worse; and enthusiastic (in the sense of weakness, not a manly, vigorous enthusiasm) to an extraordinary degree. Neither of these qualities is incompatible with great sincerity, and even elevation of mind; and for these traits we reverence his

Hosted by Google

character. Swedenborg is represented as a man of uncommonly clear judgment, which we must either wholly deny, or else impugn his character for veracity, for humility, and for philosophical consistency. Regarding him in the light of a herald of a new day, the forerunner of a purer age, we can only speak of Swedenborg as the dupe of his own fancies, and without a particle of respect for his spiritual and characteristic pretentions. In those passages where he exhorts to spiritual love, and purity of life and thought, he displays a noble spirit. Mr. De Charms has a section (pp. 47, 8], that unfolds this divine principle. But, in doctrinal points, he is sometimes far wrong; often perfectly at variance with well ascertained Christian Doctrine; sometimes crude, sometimes almost blasphemous.

Of this doctrine we shall attempt a brief sketch. The Swedenborgian believes his to be the (New Jerusalem) Church; and that the final judgment took place somewhere in the middle of the last century; that a new, and truer, and purer dispensation, commenced with Swedenborg; and although they speak of him as merely a herald of a new era, and interpreter of the Scriptures, as a servant of the Lord; still they assume for his interpretation and teaching (as it seems to us) equal weight and value with that attached to the precepts and parables of our Saviour, or (at the least) to that commonly conceded to his disciples and immediate followers. We add some of their peculiar views. Their notion of the Trinity differs from that of the only true Church. They imagine it to include a trinity of principles, and not of persons; the principles of Love and Wisdom, with the operation of both; or, as they define it, an intimate, or middle, and an ultimate principle. They assert the non-existence of a Trinity before the Incarnation of the Word; that then it

Hosted by Google

arose out of the union of the Divine and human Natures, with the operation of both ; just as in Man, there is the Soul, and Body, and Life.

Carrying out a spirit of independent inquiry, they also choose to differ from the received acceptation of the Atonement, or, as they quaintly term it, at-one-ment. They deny that God the Father was propitiated by the VICARIOUS suffering of God the Son ; since, on the ground of their different notion of the Divine Trinity, they cannot reconcile the idea to their minds. (Vide Barrett's IX. Lecture.) Both of these most important heads require a fuller discussion than we are theologians enough to give, or than, if we were, we have space, in this rapid outline, to include.

In this desultory notice, we do not pretend to preserve any formality of method, much less thoroughness of analysis, but only to touch on the most striking points. One of these is, the presumption of speaking of a peculiar sect (much as they avoid the name, they yet form a *sect*), as the *New Church*, or the NEW JERUSALEM; applying the phraseology of the Revelations, and implying a degree of holiness and immaculate purity in its members. Whatever is *new*, we might remind these sectaries, is not, therefore, *true ;* and we may quote the remark of Sheridan, of a popular speaker, that of what he said, " the new was not true, and the true not new." There is much elevated sentiment and acute metaphysical reasoning in the Swedenborgian writers ; but the morality is the best morality of the New Testament. Better there is none. Human genius cannot improve the precepts or spiritual teaching of pure Christianity ; and human invention alters only for the worse. The new interpretation, the new vouchers, we hesitate to accept ; nay, more, we reject them altogether, *whenever* they contradict the old. Mr. Barrett supposes, like

Hosted by Google

many others, most unphilosophically (as it appears to us), and most illogically, by an entirely false analogy, that theology must advance with the physical sciences. We find the earliest commentators most regarded, and for many dark sayings we may find no adequate version. Mystery must ever hang over portions of the Holy page. What is essential to be known, is plain. But there are many things we see "through a glass darkly," and which, we are reminded, are to be seen in no clearer light, while an earthly film overspreads the vision. No improved theological optics can make us see all things clearly, until our eyes (the eyes of the mind) are touched by that Divine Hand that opened the eyes of the blind Bartimeus. Spiritual truths can be discerned only in a spiritual manner; and we cannot now, save where a miracle is granted, see with a pure spiritual vision. All the aids of critical opticians, when conducted in a wrong spirit, afford rather *optical delusions* than any real benefit. We are truly told, that sensuality, self-love, worldliness, and pride, so becloud our spiritual perceptions, as to prevent our recognising the truth as it is, or loving it as we should; and, undoubtedly, the spirits of most men are too much immersed in sense; but then, no refinement of spirituality will make a prophet out of every ordinary individual. This is as absurd as the notion of another sect, with regard to speaking the Unknown Tongue, which is equally ridiculous and blasphemous; and means a *dialect* that none can controvert to be what it professes, since no one can recognise it. The followers of Swedenborg deny this mysticism; but it is palpably evident in his life and habits of mind, as well as in his version of Scripture. He taught a science of correspondencies (we see no good reason for prefixing the definite article, since we are not prepared to receive it): he has published visions of the word of

Hosted by Google

spirits. He attempts to expound the mysteries of the Book of Revelations. He expressed himself by symbol and allegory. His style is an imitation of the Scriptures, and, like the Book of Jasher, reads like a close imitation. This style of composition, we conceive, by an uninspired writer (whose credentials were not most clear), to be taking a most reprehensible and audacious liberty with the Word of God.

His science of correspondencies, which it is pretended was lost by Job, and only revived by Swedenborg himself, is a species of figurative allegory. It shows acuteness and fancy; but we can find in it no innate force compelling the conviction of the understanding. It is also singular in this respect, that it translates figurative allegories into the most literal phraseology, whilst it gives a symbolic translation to the simple records of history. Mr. Barrett speaks thus of it: "The Science of Correspondencies, as *revealed* in the writings of Swedenborg, furnishes us with a rule, and *the only rule*, as we have before said, *for interpreting aright the word of God*." Yet this species of comment and translation is full of the most startling assumptions. It denies the historical accuracy of Genesis, defining the limits of true history, which is declared to have commenced at the calling of Abraham. The first eleven chapters are taken as one continued allegory. Adam is thought to typify the first Church: the Flood, to mean a flood of ignorance and sin over the moral world. The *Waters* are understood as truths or fables, as they relate to good or evil. By Noah, and the creatures preserved in the Ark, are rendered the preservation of good principles and sound doctrine, by the Divine Providence. All this is very ingenious and plausible; we can hardly assign it a worthier title. Speculation and fancy may run on, in this manner, *ad libitum*. Purde allegory, on the other hand, is construed

Hosted by Google

into an exact and liberal narrative of futurity—a prophetic relation, in part accomplished. The New Jerusalem is localized; the Judgment Day is identified with a past epoch. Parable is considered synonymous with matter of fact history. A wise man often discovers the most wisdom in letting some things alone; in leaving moot points at rest. Swedenborg could not abstain from a rash curiosity of gazing upon the Holy of Holies; he must needs intrude into the awful precincts of the Apocalypse. And here in his daring rashness, he evinced equal folly.

His visions, and publications of an intercourse with the spiritual world, are of a piece with the rest. It is painful to see the state into which that man's mind must have fallen, who could write out such accounts as we find in Lecture xii. (pages 415, 416–418, in particular.) We are almost tempted to exclaim,

> Lo! what a noble mind was here o'erthrown!

Had Swedenborg lived a century earlier, he would have been cited as a memorable instance in old Burton's chapter on Religious melancholy. A few sentences will comprise all the criticism on the Lectures we have to offer. Mr. De Charms is the clearest writer: Mr. Barrett is more ambitious and flowery. Both are sensible thinkers, yet fall into gross blunders whenever they attempt to exalt their Hero and Master. A rather presumptuous parallel is here drawn. "We would therefore beg all who are disposed to ridicule and reject the writings of Swedenborg, on account of the alleged visions which they contain, to pause and consider, whether they do not, in their hearts, if not with their lips, *mock at the views of the Apostles and Prophets, and reject*

Hosted by Google

the Scriptures as a revelation from God." We can, by no supposition, conceive how a rejection of Swedenborg's mission, invalidates the genuineness of the Scriptures, or can presuppose such invalidation.

The followers of this fanciful theorist (for as such, in the History of Religion, the character of Swedenborg, we suspect, will finally rest) are, in the majority of cases, pure-minded and honest men; in some cases guided by a poetical temperament in the choice of a religion; in others, governed by the specious "*rationality*" of the Swedenborgian scheme. Very few eminent men are numbered in its ranks. Dr. Hartley, the metaphysician, we believe, was one; Kant appears to have been, and Coleridge was for a while attracted by Swedenborgianism, as indeed he was by every current fashionable novelty, and curious ancient heresy. American would-be Coleridges assume the doctrines, as a fair text for imposing rhetoric. It must be allowed, as we have admitted more than once, that parts of the teachings of the Swedish Apostle are imbued with the loftiest Christian morality; that his spirit bathed in an atmosphere of the purest refinement; that he saw keenly into much of the spiritual part of our nature. Here we stop in our eulogium. As a moralist, Swedenborg is above our praise; as a religious teacher, a biblical critic, an expounder of mysteries, we regard him as unsafe, dangerous, and rash. His sect is still very small, and its polity being nearer to the Congregational form of Church government than to any other, tends continually to independency, and disunion among its members. It is without an abiding principle of unity; and its excessive spirit of liberty is liable to run into licentiousness of doctrine. In Sweden there are very few of this belief; more in England and on the continent. In this country they have several

Hosted by Google

congregations: but we apprehend no stability in Swedenborgianism as a Church; but that it will gradually die out like the Quakers and the Unitarians. Still, the Church may derive excellent hints from some of the strictures of Swedenborg; and, indeed, from more than one of the spiritual Christian philosophers of modern Europe.

XVI.

RELIGIOUS SATIRE.

MANY well-intentioned, but not very deep-thinking people, are mightily frightened by anything approaching to the *argumentum ad absurdum*, in matters of religion or morality. They fancy a disrespect, at least, if not a secret contempt of Christianity from satirical assaults on those who profess, only to disgrace it. They apprehend evil from the air of levity with which such subjects are treated; an apprehension rarely verified, except in the case of the very weak, who are sure to go wrong in almost every possible event. No man but a fool or a radically bad character, ever could conceive of universal hollowness, because there were many demure and sly hypocrites in the world. A total want of faith is the unerring sign of a temper not to be trusted; of a fickle heart and a false tongue. But satire of the pretenders to true religion is, in effect, an eulogy of the sincerely good; indiscriminate praise and universal censure being alike in this respect, that finally they tend to nothing, as they nullify each other by

Hosted by Google

opposite extravagances. It is true, that satirists have sometimes transcended the proper limits of truth and discretion; have calumniated where they should have calmly censured; and have written a libel instead of a criticism. The most piquant satire is, necessarily, one-sided, and carried to the extreme verge of truth; at times overpassing it. Epigrams lose in point where they approach the truth. A moderate thinker is rarely to be found among professed wits. For, when a man comes to ponder and weigh opposite qualities and conflicting statements, to admit this excuse and allow that apology, when circumstance and occasion are considered; and, in a word, when he endeavors to strike a just balance of the actions and characters of men, he rarely can escape a trite conclusion or a mediocrity of argument. In a knowledge of most elementary truths and general propositions, the philosopher and the peasant are on a par; the difference between them consists in a knowledge of the intermediate chain of thought and reasoning on the part of the first, and ignorance in the case of the last. It is only when a point is driven home, when to paint one trait vividly, the rest of the features are thrown in the shade, that brilliancy is attained at the expense of fidelity and a liberal construction. To a reader of sense, however, a defect of this nature makes itself apparent at once, and he sifts out the false from the fair: to all other readers it matters little, for they might misconstrue the most irreproachable writer. We have frequent proof that the best book in the world has fared the worst in this respect.

Religious satire has generally been directed either against the extravagances or the hypocrisy of reformers; and when just and intelligent, it has certainly been of essential service. It may not benefit the immediate objects of it. It may harden or dishearten proselytes and late converts, re-changing

Hosted by Google

the self-styled elect into viler sinners than they were before; but it is productive of benefit to those who are not intimately connected with either any specific reformation itself or those conducting it.

The very idea of undertaking to convert the world, at the present time of day, discovers, in him who cherishes it, a palpable defect of judgment and common precaution, and will induce compassion where it does not provoke ridicule. Such innovators appear to forget how much benefit may be accomplished by the thorough performance of individual duties, to say nothing of every man's natural and (as it were) hereditary influence in his own walk and circle of society, which may be turned to the best account possible. They leave the obvious and natural claims of their Maker, their own souls, and their fellow-creatures, for the vain prosecution of fantastic projects. Like the alchemist, they think they possess a talisman, unknown to all others, for converting sinners; a talisman, that too often fails in its pretended effects when employed upon themselves.

To say that no good has accrued to society from zealous yet prudential reformation, is to assert what is palpably false; yet to conceal the great evils incurred by rash innovation and ignorant fanaticism, would be avoiding a fair statement of the case. The greatest of Reformers, Time, as we are wisely taught by Bacon, innovates silently, but is more powerful than any other. We see in the life of man, how age reveals the errors of youth, and manhood suppresses the follies of immaturity. So in the age of the world, civilization and custom must unite to eradicate (by degrees) the defects, the vices, the crimes of former ages. If the above is true of matters relating to the civil polity, to legislation and government, how much truer is it with regard to the growth and

Hosted by Google

very existence of Christianity. We are to look for no new lights here; and a modern Apostle may be suspected on *primâ facie* evidence, of being an imposter. The assumption of the character of Founder of a sect, implies a degree of pride and corresponding want of humility, hardly consistent with true piety. At the same time, it evinces rashness and ignorance. Modern religious reformers generally begin by discrediting the labors and talent of previous teachers, in order to raise the value of their own. In an attempt to go back to the standard of primitive Christianity, they discredit the succession of wise and good men, who have filled the interval with their pure thoughts and holy lives.

In effect, too, they hurt their own cause, where they treat the ministers of religion with contumely; for they destroy a respect for those external decorums, which are not only becoming in the best Christians, but considered no less than essential in the department of a polished gentleman.

Enthusiasm is, at once, the strong and the weak point of the religious reformer, enthusiasm, real or assumed; the most vulnerable point of attack.

The control of a multitude by the sympathetic feeling of enthusiasm may be spoken of as a species of animal or spiritual magnetism. We see the effect of it in such hands as those of Mahomet, Cromwell, Whitfield, Napoleon. But this is a vulgar passion, not the enthusiasm of noble natures for objects of equal worth. Ordinary religious enthusiasm is both degrading and impious; degrading as it is irrational, and impious from presumption and familiarity. As to the vulnerability of enthusiasm, we only need to read Hudibras. Yet are we no believers in the sophism of "ridicule being the test of truth." It may furnish a searching test of artificial manners. It is a touchstone for absurdities in conduct. But

Hosted by Google

religion is above it; its principles are too sacred for such a connection. The practices of fanatic religionists are, however, more absurd than any ridicule that can be heaped upon them, and they are fair game for the pen of the satirist.

The truest Christians have been, in general, moderate in their views, no advocates of human perfectibility, no Fifth Monarchy men. Pious persons, with a vein of mysticism in their characters, as Norris, Fenelon, Herbert, or Farrar, may indulge themselves in raptures and ecstasies; but these have a certain real beauty, and at least disturb not the peace of their neighbors. Modern ranters split the ears, while they would invade the souls of the groundlings, and seem to think the kingdom of Satan can be carried by the same means which toppled down the walls of Jericho.

It is a little singular, that, with a single exception, the author of Hudibras, the keenest satires on religious extravagances, and the severest censure (however humorously allegorized) that has been passed on the defects most visible in the clerical character, should have come from the pens of churchmen. Yet such has been the case from the time of Erasmus to the day of the Rev. Sidney Smith, the most celebrated of living clerical wits, including, among other names in the interval, those of South, Eachard, and Swift,—a trio, that for wit, sense, and honesty, cannot be paralleled.

Those who are most in the habit of railing at the clergy and at religious persons in general, show great ignorance and narrowness. They confound the worthy with the worthless, under a common denomination of hypocrites. It is a usual saying with such people, that they consider themselves as good Christians as any. Having seen villany and worldliness masked under the appearance of religion, they conclude all Christianity to be a deception. This is as much as if one

Hosted by Google

should pretend an accurate knowledge of human nature, from having filled the station of a jailer all his life, and seen much crime. The Newgate Calendar is but a chapter in the great Book of Life. Religious satire is not for such readers, as it gives them ideas on one side, and that the worst side, which they possess neither inclination nor ability to rebut. Their situation has precluded the possibility of an acquisition of true views on this subject, and of seeing how much more good than evil there is in the world after all (wicked as it is), despite the sneers of the profligate and the scorn of the misanthrope.

XVII.

PROSE OF BARROW.

THERE is an eloquence of the reason as well as of the imagination and of the affections. Perhaps it is more firmly based than either, and produces in the end the surest effects. It is less captivating than the descriptive eloquence of Taylor; it has less hold on the taste than the sentimental passages of Rousseau or Hazlitt, less touching than the pathos of Sterne or Mackenzie, less brilliant than the declamation of Burke or Macaulay: but it is anchored in truth; it is founded in reality; it convinces the understanding. Finally, all eloquence must come to this. We may be captivated by the glittering flashes of a copious fancy, and charmed, for an hour, by the attractive graces of manner; but the only true eloquence is that which is always such, which equally interests a future age and a foreign nation, and which is the pure essence of

Hosted by Google

the noblest reason, couched in the clearest, the most forcible, and the richest expression. Those brilliant contemporary speakers, of whom we have only a traditionary knowledge, such as Dean Kirwan, Patrick Henry, and Emmett, are rather to be regarded as consummate actors than solid orators.

To give the praise of finished oratory to the sermons of Barrow would be an extravagance of eulogy; and yet his fame is great, and his sermons most able. He possesses the utmost fulness (this side of extravagance) in point of thought and expression; yet we can hardly say as much of his style and manner. The characteristic trait of Barrow is his power of exhaustive analysis. He is a perfect mental chemist, analyzing every topic into as many parts as it is composed of, and *precipitating* (so to speak) all the falsehood in it, leaving a clear solution of truth. Our divine is one of the most liberal-minded of men. He has a wide range of thought, and mines, as it were, into the very depth of his argument. He gives you every side of every subject he handles. He knows all the false appearances sophistry may be made to wear, as disguises of the truth. He is thoroughly informed of all the bearings of his subject, and leaves no part of it untouched. Though without imagination, Barrow had such a fertility of intellect (so well cultivated was the soil), as to appear almost possessing invention in the way of topics and illustration. The secret of his invention lay in long and severe study, aided by a capacious and powerful and ready memory.

Reason was the master faculty of Barrow's mind. He seems to have had but little fancy—no imagination; not much of an eye for nature—no humor—hardly anything like delicacy of sentiment. His understanding was a robust,

Hosted by Google

hard-working faculty. His analysis was very acute and thorough — his logic exceeding close, searching, and patient. He had much and varied erudition, and a memory that was not crushed by the weight of it. This is an argument for the original force of Barrow, as well as for most of the great old prose-writers, that their learning was not too much for them. No foreign acquisitions could obscure the clear light of their own reason: learning served them for evidence, for illustration. But they never confounded knowledge and wisdom, and knew as well as the old dramatists, their grand compeers that

> "The heart
> May give a useful lesson to the head."

Hence, without vanity, they relied more on themselves than most scholars, who are too often mere pedants.

It is worthy of remark, that most of Barrow's sermons are rather moral dissertations, than what we would call, at the present day, evangelical discourses. Barrow comes nearer to a teacher of moral philosophy, than the ordinary standard of modern preaching will allow. It was his practice to write a series of sermons on certain topics of practical ethics (none the less Christian, though some would have us think so); thus, he has four sermons on industry, eight on the tongue, &c., &c. He seldom wrote less than two, and frequently three, on a single text. These are complete moral treatises. Though, in one sense, this may be considered a defect, yet, in our view (perhaps mistaken), it is a merit. Preaching too often departs from the themes of daily importance — the offices of familiar duty. Most congregations require to be taught their moral as well as their religious duties (both parts of the same great scheme, and essentially one). We have

Hosted by Google

never heard the orthodoxy of Barrow questioned, and yet it is certain he is more of a moral teacher than an Evangelical Divine.

There is a palpable defect in Barrow. He is uniformly copious. He is often tedious. He is too apt to discuss a trite theme, with all the exuberance of power he employs on one less familiar. Moreover, he is interminable. Many laughable anecdotes are related of his power of continuance. Once, at a charity sermon, he detained the audience by a discourse of three hours and a half in length. In coming down from the pulpit, and being asked if he felt tired, he replied that "he began to be weary with standing so long." It must have been as wearisome for the audience (we should imagine) to sit still that space of time, unless the church were a dark one, the cushions soft, and the pews high. On another occasion, being reminded that the congregation at the Abbey liked short sermons, he was prevailed on (with much ado) to preach but one-half of his original sermon, and that occupied an hour and a half.

With these defects, however, that must have rendered him, to light hearers of the Word, a rather tiresome preacher, he is still a right sturdy, manly intellect of the true English breed.

This intellectual robustness was joined to great strength of moral purpose and determined physical courage. Of this last quality, two remarkable instances occur to us. Being attacked at night by a powerful mastiff, he grappled with the animal, and almost choked him, before any assistance came. At sea, in the Mediterranean, the vessel in which he happened to be embarked was attacked by an Algerine corsair. Barrow could not be prevailed on to go below, but fought bravely with the crew.

Hosted by Google

These traits of character cannot fail to impress us with the feeling of high respect for Barrow's force and energy.

Though no wit, to be sure in his sermons, unless a strong sense of propriety and the absence of it can be termed wit, yet he gave Rochester one day a notable reproof, and foiled that courtly wit with his own weapons. And Barrow penned a definition of wit, amounting to an essay, which is a miracle of ingenuity of distinction and richness of expression.

Charles II. used to call Barrow "an unfair preacher," for he left nothing for future preachers to glean — unless, he might have added, to make pretty free use of the labors of their predecessors.

Lord Chatham enjoined on his son the constant study of Barrow, and Pitt declared he had his sermons almost by heart.

To show the common injudiciousness of parents in estimating the talents of their children, the father of Barrow is said to have exclaimed, "If it pleased God to take away any of his children, he hoped it would be Isaak," regarding him as a miracle of stupidity, who afterwards proved the glory of his family.

XVIII.

THE POEMS OF BISHOP CORBET.

In the list of clerical wits, comprehending some of the best writers of England, and the finest satirical humorists in the world, (Fuller, Earle, South, Eachard, Swift, Sterne, and Sid-

Hosted by Google

ney Smith,) the name of Corbet should always find a place; yet his *jeux d'esprit* and *bon-mots* are known only to the antiquary and retrospective critic. His poems are scattered up and down a variety of political collections, and have only been brought together in the present century. His modesty would not allow the public acknowledgment of them during his life, neither would he suffer any of his sermons to be printed, though they are spoken of as rarely ingenious, and if at all answerable to his conversation and verses, they must have been delicate. The best account we can gather of this eccentric wit, we find in Aubrey; and it is one of the most lively sketches in his collection. We transcribe it entire. "Richard Corbet, D.D., was the son of Vincent Corbet, (better known 'by Poynter's name than by his own'), who was a gardener at Twickenham, as I have heard my old cousen Whitney say. He was a Westminster scholar; old Parson Bussey of Allscott, in Warwickshire, went to school with him; he would say he was a very handsome man, but something apt to abuse, and a coward. He was a student of Christ Church, in Oxford. He was very facetious, and a good fellow. One time he and some of his acquaintances being merry at Frayer Bacon's study (where was good beer sold), they were drinking on the leads of the house, and one of the scholars was asleep, and had a pair of good silk stockings on: Dr. Corbet, (then M.A., if not B.D.,) got a pair of scissors and cut them full of little holes; but when the other awakened, and perceived how and by whom he had been abused, he did chastise him, and made him pay for them.

"After he was Doctor of Divinity, he sang ballads at the Crosse at Abington, on a market day. He and some of his camerades were at the taverne by the Crosse, (which, by the way, was then the finest in England: I remember it when I

Hosted by Google

was a freshman: it was admirable curious gothique architecture, and fine figures in the niches: 'twas one of those built by King ..... for his queen). The ballad singer complained he had no custom, he could not put off his ballads. The jolly Doctor put off his gown, and puts on the ballad singer's leathern jockey; and being a handsome man, and had a rare full voice, he presently vended a great many, and had a full audience. After the death of Dr. Goodwin, he was made dean of Christ Church. He had a good interest with great men, as you may find in his poems, and with the then great favorite, the D. of Bucks; his excellent wit was letter of recommendation to him. I have forgot the story, but at the same time that Dr. Fell thought to have carried it, Dr. Corbet put a pretty trick upon him to let him take a journey on purpose to London, when he had already the grant of it.

"He preach't a sermon before the King at Woodstock (I suppose King James), but it happened that he was out; on which occasion there were made these verses:

A reverend deane,
With his band starch'd cleane,
Did preach before the King;
In his band string was spied
A ring that was tied,
Was not that a pretty thing?

The ring, without doubt,
Was the thing put him out,
And made him forget what was next;
For every one there
Will say, I dare swear,
That he handled it more than his text.

Hosted by Google

"His conversation was extreme pleasant. Dr. Stubbins was one of his cronies; he was a jolly fat Dr., and a very good house-keeper. As Dr. Corbet and he were riding in Lob-lane, in wet weather ('tis an ordinary deep, dirty lane), the coach fell, and Dr. Corbet said that Dr. Stubbins was up to the elbows in mire, and *he was up to the elbows in Stubbins.* Anno Domini 1628, he was made Bishop of Oxford, and I have heard that he had an admirable, grave, and venerable aspect. One time as he was confirming, the country people pressing in to see the ceremony, said he, '*Beare off there, or I'll confirme ye with my staff.*' Another time, being to lay his hand on the head of a man very bald, he turned to his chaplain, and said, '*Some dust, Lushington*' (to keep his hand from slipping). There was a man with a great venerable beard: said the Bishop, '*You, behind the beard.*' His chaplain, Dr. Lushington, was a very learned and ingenious man, and they loved one another. The Bishop sometimes would take the key of the wine cellar, and he and his chaplain would go and lock themselves in, and be merry. Then first he lays down his episcopal hat—'*There lies the Dr.*' Then he puts off his gown—'*There lies the Bishop.*' Then 'twas—'*Here's to thee, Corbet,*' and '*Here's to thee, Lushington.*' ..... He was made Bishop of Norwich, A.D. 1632. His last words were, '*Good night, Lushington.*' ..... His poems are pure natural wit, delightful and easie."

In order to verify this criticism, we must produce some specimens of his talent and humorous satire.

Corbet's poems are very few, and half of those indifferent; but the rest is pure gold. His forte is ironical eulogy, or humorous ridicule. Yet he has natural feeling, as shown in his Epitaphs. A certain turn for Rabelaisian jests and tricks,

Hosted by Google

with an occasional palpable hit at the sectaries, must have made him an episcopal bugbear to the Puritans of his day. And certainly his deportment, at times, little suited the dignity of his order. But he flouted at dignities, knowing his manhood to be much superior to any Bishopric. He was something between Archdeacon Paley and the Clerk of Copmanhurst, while he also added a romantic fancy peculiar to himself. He was a sincere Christian, a reasonable theologian, a moderator, a wit, a good fellow. We need not apprehend but that at proper times he bore himself like a brave old bishop, and always stood erect in the integrity of a man.—His journey to France is the most finished of his sportive effusions.

DR. CORBET'S JOURNEY TO FRANCE.

I went from England into France,
Nor yet to learn to cringe or dance,
  Nor yet to ride or fence;
Nor did I go like one of those
That do return with half a nose
  They carried from hence.

But I to Paris rode along,
Much like John Dory in the song,
  Upon a holy tide.
I on an ambling nag did get,
I trust he is not paid for yet,
  And spurr'd him on each side.

And to St. Dennis fast we came,
To see the sights of Notre-Dame,
  The man that shows them snaffles;
Where who is apt for to believe,
May see our Ladie's right arm sleeve,
  And eke her old pantofles;

Hosted by Google

Her breast, her milk, her very gown
That she did wear in Bethlehem town,
When in the inn she lay.
Yet all the world knows that's a fable,
For so good clothes ne'er lay in stable
Upon a lock of hay.

No carpenter could by his trade,
Gain so much coin as to have made
A gown of so rich stuff.
Yet they, poor fools, think for their credit,
They may believe old Joseph did it,
'Cause he deserved enough.

There is one of the crosses nails,
Which whoso sees his bonnet vails,
And if he will may kneel.
Some say 'twas false, 'twas never so,
Yet, feeling it, thus much I know,
It is as true as steel.

There is a lanthorn which the Jews,
When Judas led them forth did use,
It weighs my weight downright.
But to believe it you must think
The Jews did put a candle in't,
And then 'twas very light.

There's one Saint there hath lost his nose;
Another 's head, but not his toes,
His elbow and his thumb.
But when that we had seen the rags,
We went to th' inn and took our nags,
And so away did come.

Hosted by Google

Thus wrote our merry episcopal satirist, of superstitious relics, and all the trumpery of the Romish Church. The rest of the poem is occupied with certain exquisite strokes of local satire, and a fine historical portrait of Louis XIII., truer than most historians would have painted it—and in far finer style.

Corbet wrote a number of elegies, though his vein flowed more after the manner of Sir John Suckling, than in the style of the tender Tibullus. The elegy upon his father's death is respectful and affectionate: that upon Dr. Donne, ingenius and well turned:

AN EPITAPH ON DR. DONNE, DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S.

He that would write an Epitaph for thee,
And do it well, must first begin to be
Such as thou wert; for none can truly know
Thy worth, thy life, but he that hath liv'd so.
He must have wit to spare, and to hurl down
Enough to help the gallants of the town;
He must have learning plenty, best the laws,
Civil and Common, to judge any cause;
Divinity, great store above the rest,
Not of the last edition, but the best;
He must have language, travel, all thy arts,
Judgment to use, or else he wants thy parts:
He must have friends, the highest, able to do,
Such as Mæcenas, and Augustus, too.
He must have such a sickness, such a death,
Or else his vain descriptions come beneath.
Who then shall write an Epitaph for thee,
He must be dead first; let t' alone for me.

Here follow two lively pieces, having the form of Epi-

Hosted by Google

taph, but with more of a satirical than of an elegiac spirit in them:

TO THE GHOST OF ROBERT WISDOME.

Thou, once a body, but now aire,
Arch botcher of a psalme or prayer,
From Carfax come;
And patch me up a zealous lay,
With an old *ever and ay*,
Or, *alt and some.*

Or such a spirit lend mee,
As may a hymne down send mee,
To purge my braine:
So Robert look behind thee,
Lest Turk or Pope doe find thee,
And goe to bed againe.

ON THOMAS JONCE.

Here for the nonce,
Came Thomas Jonce,
In St. Giles Church to lie.
None Welsh before,
None Welshman more,
Till Shon Clerk die.

I'll toll the bell,
I'll ring his knell,
He died well,
He's sav'd from hell;
And so farewell,
Tom Jonce.

Our last extract shall been in a different strain from any

Hosted by Google

of the foregoing. It is a poem addressed to his son Vincent Corbet on his birthday, at the age of three years.

What I shall leave thee, none can tell,
But all shall say I wish thee well;
I wish thee, Vin, before all Wealth,
Both bodily and Ghostly health:
Nor too much wit, nor wealth, come to thee,
So much of either may undo thee.
I wish thee learning, not for show,
Enough for to instruct and know;
Not such as gentlemen require,
To prate at table or at fire.
I wish thee all thy mother's graces,
Thy father's fortunes, and his places.
I wish thee friends, and one at court,
Not to build on, but support;
To keep thee, not in doing many
Oppressions, but from suffering any.
I wish thee peace in all thy ways,
Nor lazy nor contentious days;
And when thy soul and body part,
As innocent as now thou art.

Thus much from merry, wise, and kind-hearted Bishop Corbet.

XIX.

THE LADIES' LIBRARY.

THAT admirable manual of "*les petites morales*," and even of higher matters occasionally, the Spectator, contains a paper which we hesitate not to accept as a just specimen of contem-

Hosted by Google

porary satire on female education; we refer to the catalogue of a Ladies' Library. This heterogeneous collection embraces heroical romances and romancing histories, the ranting tragedies of the day, with the libertine comedies of the same period. In a word, it leads us to infer pretty plainly the insignificant pretensions the gentlewoman of Queen Anne's day could lay to anything like refinement of education, or even a correct propriety in dress and demeanor. Tell me your company, and I will disclose your own character; speak that I may know you, are trite maxims; but give me a list of your favorite authors is by no means so common, though at least as true a test. The literary and indirectly the moral depravity of taste exhibited by the women of that age, is easily accounted for, when we once learn the fashionable authors and the indifferent countenance given to any authors but those of the most frivolous description. The queen herself was an illiterate woman, and we are told never once had the curiosity to look into the classic productions of Pope. King William, the preceding sovereign, was so ignorant of books and the literary character, as to offer Swift, with whom he had been agreeably prepossessed, the place of a captain of a regiment of horse.

Indulging ourselves in a rapid transition, we pass from this era to the epoch of Johnson and Burke, and Goldsmith and Sheridan; we come to the reign of George III. Here we find the scene altered. From the gay saloon we are dropped as if by magic, into the library or conversation room. We read not of balls, but of literary dinners and æsthetic teas, and we meet for company, not thoughtless, dressy dames of fashion and minions of the goddess of pleasure, but grave, precise professors in petticoats, women who had exchanged a world of anxiety for the turn of a head-dress, or the shape of

Hosted by Google

a flounce for an equally wise anxiety about the philosophy of education, the success of their sonnets and tragedies, and moral tales for the young. The pedantry of authorship and dogmatic conversation superseded the more harmless pedantry of dress. Then we read of the stupidest company in the world, which arrogated to itself the claim of being the best. A race of learned ladies arose; bas-bleus, the Montagues, the Mores, the Sewards, the Chapones, patronised by such prosing old formalists as Doctors Gregory and Aiken, and even by one man of vigorous talent, Johnson, and one man of real genius, Richardson. The last two endured much, because they were flattered much.

When we speak thus contemptuously of learned ladies, we intend to express a disgust at the pretensions of that name. Genuine learning can never be despised, whoever may be its possessor; but of genuine learning it is not harsh to suspect a considerable deficiency where there is so much of display and anxious rivalry. Where the learning is exact and solid, it is to be remembered that many departments are utterly unsuited to the female mind; where, at best, little can be accomplished, and that of a harsh repulsive nature. We want no Daciers, no Somervilles, no Marcets, but give us an you will as many Inchbalds, Burneys, Edgeworths, Miss Barretts, as can he had for love or money.

We believe the question as to the relative sexual distinctions of intellectual character, is now generally considered as settled. There is allowed to be a species of genius essentially feminine. Equality is no more arrogated than superiority of ability, and it would be as wisely arrogated. The most limited observation of life and the most superficial acquaintance with books, must effectually demonstrate the superior capacity of man for the great works of life and speculation. It is

Hosted by Google

true, great geniuses are rare and seldom needed, and the generality of women rank on a par with the generality of men. In many cases, women of talent surpass men of an equal calibre of mere talent, through other and constitutional causes—a greater facility of receiving and transmitting impressions, greater instinctive subtlety of apprehension, and a livelier sympathy. We cordially admit that female intellect, in the ordinary concerns of life and the current passages of society, has often the advantage of the masculine understanding. Cleverness outshines solid ability, and a smart woman is much more showy than a profound man. In certain walks of authorship, too, women are preëminently successful: in easy narrative of real or fictitious events (in the last implying a strain of ready invention), in lively descriptions of natural beauty or artificial manners; in the development of the milder sentiment of love; in airy, comic ridicule. On the other hand, the highest attempts of women in poetry have uniformly failed. We have read of no female epic of even a respectable rank; those who have written tragedies, have written moral lectures (of an inferior sort) like Hannah More; or anatomies of the passions, direct and formal, like Joanna Baillie; or an historical sketch, as Rienzi. We are apt to suspect that the personal charms of Sappho prove too much for the admirers of her poetic rhapsodies, otherwise Longinus has done her foul injustice; for the fragment he quotes is to be praised and censured chiefly for its obscurity. This would have been a great merit in Lycophron.

In the volume of British Poetesses, edited by Mr. Dyce, it is astonishing to find how little real poetry he has been able to collect out of the writings of near a century of authors, scattered over the surface of five or six centuries. It must be allowed that some of the finest short pieces by female writers

Hosted by Google

have appeared since the publication of that selection. In the volume referred to, much sensible verse and some sprightly copies of verse occur; a fair share of pure reflective sentiment, delivered in pleasing language rarely rising above correctness; of high genius there is not a particle,—no pretensions to sublimity or fervor. The best piece and the finest poem we think, is the charming poem of Auld Robin Gray. That is a genuine bit of true poesy, and perfect in the highest department of the female imagination, in the pathos of domestic tragedy. In the present century we have Mrs. Hemans, Mrs. Howitt and Mrs. Southey, but chief of all, Miss Barrett. The finest attempts of the most pleasing writers of this class, always excepting the noble productions of the last named poetess, do not rise so high as the delightful ballad above named. They are sweet, plaintive, moral strains, the melodious notes of a lute, tuned by taper fingers in a romantic bower, not the deep, majestic, awful tones of the great organ, or the spirited and stirring blasts of the trumpet. The ancient bard struck wild and mournful, or hearty and vigorous notes from his harp—perchance placed "on a rock whose frowning brow," &c., and striving with the rough symphonies of the tempest: but the sybil of modern days plays elegant and pretty, or soft and tender airs upon the flageolet or accordion, in the boudoir or saloon.

A poet is, from the laws both of physiology and philology —masculine. His vocation is manly, or rather divine. And we have never heard any traits of feminine character attributed to the great poet (in the Greek sense), the Creator of the universe. The muses are represented as females, but then they are the inspirers, never the composers, of verse. Women should be the poet's muse, as she is often the poet's theme. Let female beauty then sit for her portrait instead of being

Hosted by Google

the painter. Let poets chaunt her charms, but let her not spoil a fair ideal image by writing bad verses. If all were rightly viewed, a happy home would seem preferable to a seat on Parnassus, and the Fountain of Content would furnish more palatable draughts than the Font of Helicon. The quiet home is not always the muses' bower; though we trust the muses' bower is placed in no turbulent society.

Women write for women. They may entertain, but cannot, from the nature of the case, become instructors of men. They know far less of life; their circle of experience is confined. They are unfitted for many paths of active exertion, and consequently are rendered incapable of forming just opinions on many matters. We do not include a natural incapacity for many studies, and as natural a dislike for many more. Many kinds of learning, and many actual necessary pursuits and practices, it is deemed improper for a refined woman to know. How, then, *can* a female author become a teacher of man?

Literature would miss many pleasant associations if the names of the best female writers were expunged from a list of classic authors, and the world would lose many delightful works—the novel of sentiment and the novel of manners, letter-writers, moral tales for children, books of travels, gossipping memoirs—Mrs. Inchbald, Madame D'Arblay, Miss Edgeworth, Lady M. W. Montague, Miss Martineau, and Miss Sedgwick, with a host besides. Women have sprightliness, cleverness, smartness, though but little wit. There is a body and substance in true wit, with a reflectiveness rarely found apart from a masculine intellect. In all English comedy, we recollect but two female writers of sterling value —Mrs. Centlivre and Mrs. Cowley, and their plays are formed on the Spanish model, and made up of incident and intrigue,

Hosted by Google

much more than of fine repartees or brilliant dialogue. We know of no one writer of the other sex, that has a high character for humor—no Rabelais, no Sterne, no Swift, no Goldsmith, no Dickens, no Irving. The female character does not admit it.

Women cannot write history. It requires too great solidity, and too minute research for their quick intellects. They write, instead, delightful memoirs. Who, but an antiquary or historical commentator, would not rather read Lucy Hutchinson's Life of her Husband, than any of the professed histories of the Commonwealth—and exchange Lady Fanshawe for the other royalist biographers?

Neither are women to turn politicians or orators. We hope never to hear of a female Burke; she would be an overbearing termagant. A species of a talent for scolding, is the highest form of eloquence we can conscientiously allow the ladies.

Women feel more than they think, and (sometimes) say more than they do. They are consequently better adapted to describe sentiments, than to speculate on causes and effects. They are more at home in writing letters, than tracts on political economy.

The proper faculties in women to cultivate most assiduously are, the taste and the religious sentiment; the first, as the leading trait of the intellectual; and the last, as the governing power of the moral constitution. Give a woman a pure taste and high principles, and she is safe from the arts of the wiliest libertine. Let her have all other gifts but these, and she is comparatively defenceless. Taste purifies the heart as well as the head, and religion strengthens both. The strongest propensities to pleasure are not so often the means of disgrace and ruin as the carelessness of ignorant

Hosted by Google

virtue, and an unenlightened moral sense. This makes all the difference in the world, between the daughter of a poor countryman, and the child of an educated gentleman. Both have the same desires, but how differently directed and controlled. Yet we find many lapses from virtue in the one case, where we find one in the other.

Believing that what does not interest, does not benefit the mind, we would avoid all pedantic lectures to women, on all subjects to which they discover any aversion. Study should be made a pleasure, and reading pure recreation. In a general sense, we would say the best works for female readers are those that tend to form the highest domestic character. Works of the highest imagination, as being above that condition, and scientific authors, who address a different class of faculties, are both unsuitable. An admirable wife may not relish the sublimity of Milton or Hamlet; and a charming companion be ignorant of the existence of such a science as Algebra. A superficial acquaintance with the elements of the physical sciences is worse than total unacquaintance with them.

Religion should be taught as a sentiment, not as an abstract principle, or in doctrinal positions, a sentiment of love and grateful obedience; morality impressed as the practical exercise of self-denial and active benevolence. In courses of reading, too much is laid down of a dry nature. Girls are disgusted with tedious accounts of battles and negotiations, dates and names. The moral should be educed best fitted for the female heart, and from the romantic periods, and the reigns of female sovereigns, or epochs when women held a very prominent place in the state, or in public regard. We would have women affectionate wives, obedient daughters, agreeable companions, skilful economists, judicious friends;

Hosted by Google

but we must confess it does not fall within our scheme to make them legislators or lawyers, diplomatists or politicians. We therefore think nine-tenths of all history is absolutely useless for all women. Too many really good biographies of great and good men and women can hardly be read, and will be read to much greater advantage than histories, as they leave a definite and individual impression. The reading good books of travels is, next to going over the ground in person, the best method of studying geography, grammar and rhetoric (the benefit flowing from *these* studies is chiefly of a negative character), after a clear statement of the elementary rules) are best learnt in the perusal of classic authors, the essayists, &c.; and, in the same way, the theory of taste and the arts. The most important of accomplishments is not systematically treated in any system—conversation. But a father and mother, of education, can teach this better than any professor. Expensive schools turn out half-trained pupils. Eight years at home, well employed, and two at a good but not fashionable school, are better than ten years spent in the most popular female seminary, conducted in the ordinary style.

XX.

THE EARLY MATURITY OF GENIUS. *

Men of quick imaginations, *ceteris paribus* are more prudent than those whose imaginations are slow, for they observe more in less time.—*Hobbes' Treatise of Human Nature.*

It is perhaps worth remarking that the *Principles of Human Knowledge* were published in 1710, at a time when the author was only five-and-twenty, as was

* 1844.

Hosted by Google

The Essay on Vision, the greatest by far of all his works, and the most complete example of elaborate analytical reasoning and particular induction joined together, that perhaps ever existed. * * * * I mention this the more because I believe that the greatest efforts of intellect have almost always been made while the passions are in their greatest vigor and before hope loses its hold on the heart, and is the elastic spring which animates all our thoughts.—*Hazlitt—Literary Remains—Lecture on Locke's Essays.*

We design the present article rather as a sketch of literary statistics, a table of instances, to illustrate the general principle we aim to establish, than as anything like a complete survey or accurate digest of the subject which it would require a volume to contain. We consider the fact as having an historical basis, as founded in the history of letters, that true genius comes to maturity much sooner than is generally supposed. In a word, we have merely collected a number of witnesses to confirm the maxim stated by Steele, though in a rather restricted form. It occurs in a paper of the Lover, number twenty-two: "I am apt to think that before thirty, a man's natural and acquired parts are at that strength, with a little experience, to enable him (if he can be enabled) to acquit himself well in any business or conversation he shall be admitted to."

The vulgar error is to rate the growth of the individual intellect of the original with the ordinary progress of "the common mind;" to measure the giant by the common standard of human stature. This is evidently absurd. Yet no error is so common as to attempt to depress cleverness by sneers at the youthful age of the aspirant, like the taunts of Walpole directed against Pitt, and like those of every dull man, of middle age, who has a fixed position (beyond which he is not likely to rise), at those who are evidently fast rising above him. No young man of talent, but has had enemies such as these to encounter; men who seem to take a fiendish

Hosted by Google

delight, and cherish a malicious pleasure in seeking to depress everything like genuine enthusiasm and the buoyant ambition of the bright boy or the brilliant young man. This arises half the time from sheer malice, and as often from pure ignorance of the nature and temperament of genius. When the "climber upward" has gained his place among his peers, then these miserable flatterers cringe and fawn as basely as they formerly maligned and ridiculed him; and would fain crowd out of sight his old friends and staunch adherents. In his green age and budding season the youth of genius craves and requires sympathy. It is with him, especially (and, in a measure, with all men,) an intellectual want, as evident as the coarsest necessary elements of existence.

By early maturity of genius, we mean no prodigies of childish or boyish talent—such we always distrust, as unhealthy prematureness, generally resulting in a feeble manhood. Wonderful boys are almost always dull men. No particular point of time can be fixed, but manly intellects are at their maturity somewhere between twenty-five and thirty; and in good constitutions, this vigor and freshness remain sometimes to a great age. Youth is a heavy charge to lay against any writer, yet one becoming daily of less weight. Surely it is a season which furnishes qualities and feelings not to be expected in later life, and at least to be cherished for that reason. To the contemners of youthful genius, we would reply, in the words of the admirable Cowley, himself an example of precocity of talent: "It is a ridiculous folly to laugh at the stars because the moon and the sun shine brighter." Let every captious critic, also, read Bacon's exquisite essay on "Youth and Age," in which he will find the truest justice allotted to each period of this our mortal life.

Hosted by Google

The majority of true poets have, as a general rule, produced their best works at a very early age, comparatively. A very few distinguished instances, on the other side of the question, cannot affect the principle we aim to establish, but rather by especial inference, as they furnish the exception, so far they go to establish the general maxim. Youth is naturally the season of enjoyment, and genial enjoyment as naturally gives birth to the sweetest, the most cordial, the delicatest strains of the muse. Yet we do not mean by youth the season of childhood, or boyhood, but the period of mature adolescence, from twenty-four to thirty. Very many fine poets have actually *done their best* before even this epoch; and all who have ever become eminent for the exercise of the imaginative faculty, have discovered some signs at least of its existence while in their teens: a very small number of great names being excluded. In a list of the classic English poets, we find but rare examples of late poetical genius; Chaucer, Dryden, Young, Johnson, Cowper, Milton, who composed Paradise Lost, about middle life, yet wrote Comus at the age of twenty-six, when it was first performed as a Masque, at Ludlow castle, in Wales. In the drama, where one might justly admit a late development of poetical power, inasmuch as that department of poetry demands more and more cultivated faculties than any other: even in comedy, requiring a close observation of manners, and a keen insight into character, we still find the capital writers producing their master-pieces, while other men are hardly fitted by reading and a knowledge of life even to criticise them. Thus, Shakspeare's first play was printed in his twenty-seventh year: Jonson's Every Man in his Humor, with those admirable portraits of the braggadocio in Bobadil, and of the jealous husband, in Kitely, was written in his twenty-second year.

Hosted by Google

The last play of Farquhar, the Recruiting Officer, appeared a few weeks before his death, which occurred when he was only twenty-seven, and his other delightful comedies were produced some years earlier. Congreve's Old Bachelor was the fruit of his college years, and appeared in his twenty-first year. The masterpiece of English comedy, Love for Love, only two years afterwards. Sheridan's Rivals, inferior only to the School for Scandal, was performed in his twenty-fourth year. The first fruits of Goethe and Schiller's dramatic genius (unlike those of the other writers we have quoted, in not being by any means their best, yet as evincing power and future dramatic skill), Goetz of Berlinchen, and the Robbers, at the respective ages of twenty-two and twenty-one. Sheridan Knowles, the earliest of living English Dramatists, is the last instance we remember of early dramatic genius.

In prose fiction, requiring at least equal knowledge of character and manners, with comedy—we have Roderick Random, perhaps Smollett's best work, at twenty-seven, and the Man of Feeling, at twenty-six. Fielding, Sterne, and Richardson were later. But in the present century, Hood, Hook, and Dickens, unquestionably wrote their best works earliest.

Among the miscellaneous poets, Hall's first and last volume of poetry, full of vigor and mature knowledge of life, was published in his twenty-third year. Warton admits that Donne's best poetry was written before the age of twenty-five. Sir John Suckling died at twenty-eight. Cowley is generally considered precocious: his first volume appeared when he was a boy of thirteen. But his best poetry was the growth of his later years. Pope's Ode to Solitude is often referred to. He was twelve years old when he

Hosted by Google

wrote it: a greater miracle was his producing such a body of acute criticism, as his famous Essay on Criticism displays, when he was but twenty-one. Akenside's chief work, the Pleasures of the Imagination, at twenty-three. Collins's noble odes were written at twenty-six. Burns's first volume was first printed when the poet was twenty-eight; under favorable influences, his genius had undoubtedly blossomed much sooner. Classic English poetry in this nineteenth century has been written by young poets, and even the master of them all, still living, wrote his characteristic pieces quite early. Wordsworth's first volume came out at the age of twenty-three; the Pleasures of Hope at twent-one: the wonderful Ancient Mariner, in which some critics can see nothing was written at twenty-four; Byron's second canto of Childe Harold, at twenty-four. Of contemporary English poets, we believe all of them without exception produced their finest things at a very early age—Proctor, Moore, Hunt, Tennyson, Miss Barrett, Hood, and a brilliant galaxy of smaller stars. Two, perhaps, in their separate walks, the finest poets of this century (Goethe, Schiller, and Wordsworth excepted), died very early; Shelley at thirty, and Keats at twenty-four. We reserve a page for American Bards, in conclusion, when we come to speak of American Literature, and of this very striking feature in it of the early age at which our finest writers have done their best things, and of an equally singular trait, discernible in the fact, that after a comparatively early period, they either ceased to produce or fell off very considerably. Meantime, we notice a fact as remarkable as the early maturity of genius, *i. e.*, of the creative power, in imaginative productions, in the history of those eminent for critical and speculative ability. The first and greatest critics, moralists, and prose writers performed, what we are apt to

Hosted by Google

conceive a still greater wonder, in exhibiting at so youthful a period, uncommon abilities, in departments generally consigned to the man of tried experience and mature years; some of the greatest monarchs and generals the world has ever seen performed feats the most brilliant, while quite young men. It is only necessary to refer to Alexander the Great, Cæsar, the first Prince of Orange, his son Maurice, William III. of England, Gustavus Adolphus, Eugene, Marlborough, Peter the Great, Charles of Sweden, Washington, Napoleon, and Clive.

There is a genius for criticism, for metaphysical investigation and politics, as well as for poetry or any of the arts. We will select our illustrations of this at random. Bacon, at thirteen, entered Cambridge: at sixteen wrote against the Aristotelian logic—at nineteen put forth a pamphlet on the existing state of Europe: at twenty-six (some say at fifteen) planned the Novum Organon. Burke wrote his Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful, at the age of twenty-six. Macaulay has remarked a wonderful coincidence (certainly in itself unaccountable, yet not confined to those two admirable writers); that the judgment was the faculty first developed in them, but that fancy came much later; that at middle age, they were most just and logical and comprehensive in their sober speculations, yet then also just in the dawn of that gorgeous eloquence, which was richest in their latest works. Hazlitt furnishes a similar instance. His first work, on the Principles of Human Action, was published in his twenty-fifth year. He says he was engaged upon it for eight years; and we should suspect the same thing from internal evidence. It is hard, dry and jejune: yet close and rigidly logical, with, as Macintosh thinks, much power of metaphysical speculation. How different is this from his Table-Talk

Hosted by Google

and Plain Speakers and Lectures: abounding not only in subtle and deep thought, but picturesque, rich, eloquent and glancing. Brown's Religio Medici was the work of his twenty-seventh or eighth year. Brown, the Scotch metaphysician, whose later style was flowery to excess, and even effeminate in a high degree, composed a Tract on Causation, which at once gave him high rank as a metaphysician, when he had not reached his eighteenth year. The elegant Hume's first philosophical essays, written or at least planned at College, were published at twenty-six, and are so much less readable than his easy historical narration, that Hazlitt himself designates the Treatise on Nature, as "a metaphysical chokepear." Among the Poets, we omitted one, who was almost as much of a critic, Beaumont, who died at twenty-nine: having written the Maid's Tragedy, (a delicate as well as judicious work) at twenty-one. Pope comes in, for critical skill, in his capital versified Essay on Criticism at twenty-one, and in his choice letters, those to Wycherly, at seventeen. A few of the great old English Divines, we have looked into, for this particular purpose. We gather these results: Fuller, the wit and church historian's first work, came out when he was twenty-three. Taylor was Laud's, and South Clarendon's chaplain; and known universally for their eloquence, at twenty-seven. Butler corresponded with Dr. Clarke while a boy at school.

A few miscellaneous instances. Feltham's Resolves was written at eighteen, a remarkable instance of youthful judgment.

The sagacious, brave Burleigh, first held office at court when just twenty-two. Sir Thomas More, before him, had been elected to parliament at the same age. Pitt was premier at twenty-five. Hallam, while a collegian, planned his

Hosted by Google

history of the Middle Ages. The founders of the Edinburgh Review, and the ablest writers for it, were all of them young men—Jeffrey, Macintosh, Brougham, Smith.

Certain persons cannot see, that judgment, where it is the nicest, most tolerant, and comprehensive, and exact, is not always the fruit of study nor the growth of experience. It often precedes both; and is an instinctive faculty—an original talent—applying this truth to the instances of a low judgment in matters (not of literature or philosophy, as we have considered it) relating to ordinary business. Steele has a paper of excellent sense and liberal tendency in the Lover, written with his accustomed facility and grace. The writer of the thoughts on the subject is supposed to be a correspondent, a young man, who complains bitterly of "a general calamity that obstructs or suspends the advancement of the younger men in the pursuit of their fortune"—(a complaint not to be rashly made in this country). "The utmost inconveniences are owing to the difficulty we meet with in being admitted into the society of men in years, and adding thereby the early knowledge of men and business to that of books, for the reciprocal improvement of each other. One of fifty as naturally imagines the same insufficiency in one of thirty, as he of thirty does of one of fifteen, and each age is thus left to instruct itself by the natural course of its own reflection and experience." Further on, he remarks thus: "Of the common divisions of business, which everybody knows are directed by form, and require rather diligence and honesty than grave ability in the execution." Truly enough, most business is purely mechanical; and the so-styled learned professions are as mechanical in their pedantic adherence to forms, as any branch of mechanics. The true conclusion Steele aims at, is couched in the following passage, which appears to us

Hosted by Google

to hit the truth with accuracy and justice:—"A good judgment will not only supply, but go beyond experience; for the latter is only a knowledge that directs us in the dispatch of matters future, from the consideration of matters past of the same nature; but the former is a perpetual and equal direction in everything that can happen, and does not follow, but makes the precedent that guides the other."

If we come nearer home, and take our examples from American literature, we shall be taught to look with generosity on young writers, and take heed lest we merit the wise censure of Cowley, who has written, "it is an envious frost that which nips the blossoms, because they appear quickly." Hardly an instance in American literature of a late writer of the first class, can be referred to. Our poets have been wonderfully precocious. Bryant can be paralleled only by Coleridge. Thanatopsis was written at eighteen; we recollect no poem of equal excellence produced so early by any poet, save the author of the Ancient Mariner. Yet Bryant has done nothing finer. The only wonder is, that he alone has preserved his poetical faculty, pure and fresh, still. Dana, his contemporary, has long been silent; so, too, we may say, of Halleck and their compeers, Pierpoint, Sprague, and Percival. Four of our most promising bards died young—Drake and Eastburn, and Sands and Brainard. The true successors, in some cases their equals, or their superiors, are still young—Holmes, Willis, Longfellow, Mathews, and Lowell. Our best fiction was written by young men, Cooper and Brown, who produced "Wieland" at twenty-seven. Irving and Paulding have long since concluded their career as masterly comic satirists. Webster's later speeches are not equal to his first orations. Wirt neglected literature as soon as he began to rise in his profession. But, of former cases in point,

Hosted by Google

we suspect it is not generally known that our great men, of the Revolutionary age, were uncommonly premature. Fisher Ames made a great speech at the age of twenty-three. Hamilton, a youth, wrote essays ascribed to Jay. Jay, still a young man, wrote the address to the people of Great Britain, just previous to the Revolution. Washington, at twenty-three, was commander of the Virginia forces. Patrick Henry and Jefferson were both of them greatly distinguished before thirty. At present, our leading periodical writers, active politicians, clergymen, and men of letters generally, are, in nine cases out of ten, as might readily be shown, if it were proper to mention names, men under thirty years of age. It is, therefore, dangerous to advise a young man, or any man of ability, to refrain from composition, or any walk of active life, unless the critic be well assured that he is of at least equal rank in respect to abilities and acquisitions, that no tendency of jealousy or feeling of envy can be possibly ascribed to him, and that he possess an assemblage of qualities, mental and moral, that rarely falls to the lot of a single individual. Let it be remembered, too, that to be worthily received, and have its due weight, advice must be sought; else it will be justly regarded in the light of an impertinent intrusion and voluntary censure.

XXI.

NOTORIETY.

A WRITER who could unite the philosophy of Bacon and the satire of Churchill, would be the author to undertake an essay on Notoriety. In the absence of any such extraordinary com-

Hosted by Google

bination of talent, we venture to address ourselves to the subject; to revive certain moral sentiments of equal worth and antiquity, an abundant apology for which, if any were necessary, would be found in the very fact of the great excellence of the sentiments themselves.

Ancient fame has given place to modern notoriety. Solid repute is, now-a-days, lost in fashionable applause, and the hero and bard, whose praise has furnished the theme of centuries, is cast into the shade by the idol of the hour. Of the different varieties of notoriety attainable by the arts of intrigue, the quackeries of impudence, or the settled fraud of a lifetime, we shall, after running over the titles of a few, confine ourselves at present, chiefly to notoriety in literature, to the means of making a reputation by cant, imposture, and the influence of fashion.

Notoriety is spurious fame; a desire of obtaining it, false ambition. One intoxicated with the love of public fame (in the lower view of fame), had rather be ill-known than unknown. At any sacrifice, he would make a name. He would be talked of, if not cared for; had rather be in men's mouths than in their hearts. He would be well spoken of rather than trivially thought of. It is not that he would be always praised—nay, sometimes he would prefer abuse, as an object of attack, and to give him an opportunity of replying to it. It is the weak man's diseased ambition; the fool's fame; the knave's bane; the courtier's life; the fopling's breath; the wise man's detestation; the honest man's disgust.

Notoriety is attached to every calling and profession, art, science, trade or mystery. There is nothing in life which it may not affect; no face it cannot assume.

It haunts the pulpit, the university, the bar, the surgeon's hall; it is found in political assemblies and literary meetings;

Hosted by Google

it rules supreme in the drawing-room, the theatre, the street, the watering-place, the tavern.

What ways and means are employed to accomplish the great end! what struggles and anxieties to appear what one is not! what endeavors to hide these very attempts! A private scandal, or a newspaper paragraph; an abusive letter written by the party in question to himself; a self-inflicted libel; a domestic quarrel; a course of libertinism made public; these are a few of the thousand baits to catch the public ear. A public official relieves a poor woman, the act is at once translated into the newspapers; a wealthy citizen has fallen ill, it is immediately chronicled; a valuable shawl is worn by the wife of a celebrated statesman, it is universally made known. It is the whole business of the entire lives of most of the butterflies of fashion, to plot how they shall make themselves conspicuous from day to day. Absurdities in dress or equipage are getting to be stale devices; what we shall have next, we are wanting in imagination to conceive.

How to make a reputation in letters, is a nice problem for him to solve who has neither learning, genius, talents, nor enthusiasm. It is generally persons devoid of these fundamental requisites that most affect the fame of author and scholar; though it must be confesesd, their purposes are ulterior, and do not rest in the bare enjoyment of a name. They catch at the chance of reputation for the sake of an introduction into what is called (one would think from irony) good society, or even for the mere gratification of seeing their names in print.

Cant in literature is, next to cant in religion, the most despicable thing in the world; the cant of the pretenders to literature is always so thorough-going as quite to obscure a

Hosted by Google

really worthy but modest scholar. The quack will carry off by far the plurality of votes by the mere force of external display.

Fashion is never more absurd than in her patronage of letters. She inevitably mistakes pretence for performance, and fails to distinguish between merit and presumption. A fashionable author is, generally, a writer whose books are read only by people of fashion, and that only for a season or two. The fashionable author is made such, more by his manner and address than by any quality in his writings worthy of notice. He dresses well, therefore takes rank as an elegant poet: he can carve neatly, hence is granted station as a critic or philosopher. The true poet, the genuine philosopher, is never fashionable—except as an incident to his reputation—it being a peculiar quality of the servile crowd to join in wherever they hear a shout. The great author writes for the whole world; the writer of fashion for a very circumscribed sphere or clique of readers. What is in cant phrase styled the "great world" of fashion, is, in fact the most insignificant field of authorship. Fashionable people take more pleasure in creating reputation out of nothing, than in worshipping established idols, inasmuch as it gratifies their self-love. Of an inferior scribbler they make a genius for a season, and then cast him off, as they do their tailor or their hounds—whence the poor victim readily concludes, or should, that notoriety, like all matters of fashion, is merely a reigning folly, a current prejudice.

Somewhat connected with the subject of fashionable reputation, is the question of the public taste, more influenced by mere notoriety, than, perhaps, most readers imagine.

As a general rule, the public taste is vicious to a great degree. This is abundantly proved by the innumerable in-

Hosted by Google

stances of ephemeral popularity, and consequent neglect of many of the best writers. *Their* works happen to hit a particular taste, or favor a prevailing fashion; they chime in with the prejudices, and foster the passions of the day, and are rewarded by a short-lived reputation. In judging of poetry, in particular, one can hardly be too fastidious, who recollects that at one time Jonson lorded it over Shakspeare: at another, Cato was esteemed the first of English tragedies: and still later, Darwin and Hayley were thought great poets. How many schools are extinct, how many great men have proved in the eyes of posterity (that severe judge), very small persons indeed! How many philosophical systems have been consigned to oblivion, with their inventors and promulgators! What shoals of tragedies, epics, novels of every description, lives, travels, sermons, speeches, and periodicals, choke up the river of Lethe—across that stream who can venture unless first drugged to sleep by the pages of a writer

Sleepless himself, to give his readers sleep?

Taste is a natural sensibility to excellence, heightened by the nicest observation, and perfected by close study. If we allow this, how dare the great multitude of readers to set up their critical claims? Every man now is a reader, and a critic of course. What a monstrous absurdity is this? In other things we see its ridiculousness, but we seem blind here.

The purest poetry and the noblest philosophy are so much above the comprehension of vulgar minds, that they never can be popular—so with the most delicate wit and humor, and the finest works of fancy. Pure language and an elegant simplicity, are also out of the reach of common intellects.

Hosted by Google

Sure fame is a very different thing from notoriety. Cowley has placed the idea of fame in the proper light. He says, "I love and commend a *true good fame*, because it is *the shadow of virtue:* not that it doth any good to the body which it accompanies, but it is an efficacious shadow, and, like that of St. Peter, cures the diseases of others."* The true fame is, "that which follows, not that which is run after;" the companion of goodness, not the lacquey of fashion.

We have treated notoriety as a fraud of men; it is sometimes the dream of youth—an honest dream. When we are young, we are goaded by a false impulse, and would be famous without any regard to the conditions of obtaining fame; but when years have brought a certain equable gravity of temper, and calmness of judgment, we begin to see things in their true colors, and to value a life of virtue above a life of honors. We at last discover the pitiful shifts of those who would obtain notoriety, and the incredible meannesses to which they subject themselves, by their ignorant zeal in the pursuit of worldly glory. Titles, wealth, applause, what chimeras ye are! what bubbles ye make of us your greedy followers! The highest powers of intellect, the most brilliant gems of poesy, are incomparably inferior to the possession of a peaceful conscience, and a heart filled with none but good intentions.

The fame of the popular poet, or the great general, has an almost overpowering charm for the young man; but a later age, which cools his blood, clears his mind also, and he only wonders how he ever happened to entertain such images of greatness, as the gods of his idolatry. The flashes of the skilful rhetorician captivate the youthful student; but the

* Essay on Obscurity.

Hosted by Google

powers of the philosophic reasoner attract his maturer judgment. Light, airy poetry is fit food for the raw critic; but experience and reflection give the palm to a deeper and more majestic vein. Amusement gains us then, but instruction holds us now. Then, we imagine we have learnt all that is to be known; now, we feel our real ignorance of the highest mysteries, and would die learning. Thus we see the love of applause (in its place, and in its integrity, a noble incentive to generous action) is still an insufficient motive. Milton, in that well known passage, which summons all the powers of the soul as with the sound of a trumpet, has written nobly of fame—as

> The spur which the clear spirit doth raise.

Though he feels obliged to add

> (That last infirmity of noble minds),
> To scorn delights and live laborious days.

Yet as fame is not altogether of a disinterested nature (though the interestedness is of the highest character), it cannot furnish the only sure foundation for a life of virtue. The sense of duty is our only resource; and on that, as on an eternal and immutable foundation, we may erect a superstructure as high as our genius may serve to raise it, sacred to both genius and virtue.

Hosted by Google

XXII.

LETTERS.

NEXT to the essay, the letter is the most agreeable form of the minor literature. It is the most familiar species of writing, and approaches the nearest to ordinary converation. Letters are the *opuscula* of great authors, but they form the *opera* of lesser writers. We weekly critics and magazinists may be proud of a volume of clever epistles, fearful of essaying a higher flight. Authors of the first class, and with the highest pretensions, affect to look down upon letters as the mere entertainment of a scholar; and hence, from want of sympathy, no less than from want of nicety of apprehension and subtle delicacy of taste, have almost uniformly failed in this department of composition. A professed orator, a great divine, poet or philosopher, cannot easily descend from the heights of speculation and eloquence and imagination, to the plain ground of commonplace reality. Raillery is the most delightful talent in epistolary composition (a delicate talent); and next to that, refined sentiment. These are minute excellences, however agreeable, in the great character, and the incidental ornaments of a strong intellect. Women uniformly write the best letters, both of the narrative kind and lively description. Lady Montague and Madame D'Arblay are yet unsurpassed. The female intellect is allowed to possess a finer tact and a minuter (instinctive) observation of things and characters, than the manly understanding. It is better pleased with the details of a subject, and paints the manners with a lighter hand. Boarding-school girls, and young ladies, who have just "come out," are readier with their pens in recounting family history, and current fashion-

Hosted by Google

able news; in giving a relation of the incidents at a ball or dinner-party, at sketching portraits of the beaux and their admirers; and, in a word, at all the arts of gossiping and scandal, than boys or young men, much older. Richardson has shown this very conclusively in his novels. His letters are the very counterparts of those of young ladies in the same situation, and such as they would naturally write.

Letters are valuable for many reasons. As a test of character, and affording an unconscious autobiography—as materials for literary and political history—as pictures of the times—as the repositories of individual opinions and peculiar sentiments. As a test of character, letters are worth much more than the more ordinary (supposed) keys to that sort of knowledge. A man's autograph may be very far from characteristic. I know a generous man, who writes a mean, cramped scrawl, and an undecided one, whose chirography is firm and regular. Physiognomy may belie the brightness of the head and the goodness of the heart. Phrenology may regard as an indifferent specimen the casket that contains a golden brain. But a number of confidential letters addressed to familiar friends, and written in all the warmth of confidence, afford the fairest means of getting at the real character of the writer. Yet insincerity may occur here. Letters are often written for the public eye, though on the most confidential subjects. Pope and Walpole wrote for posterity. They wrote at, rather than to, their correspondents. So, also, of the French wits. We confine ourselves entirely to English authors, however, in the present paper. Some authors have told their history in letters, as Howell, Gray, Cowper, Burns, and Lamb,—dwelling on petty occurrences and comparatively slight traits, with an unction and gusto that would not be allowed in a formal biography. Of the historical value of

Hosted by Google

letters, no complete student can doubt, and none but he can appreciate it adequately.

English literature is rich in letters from Howell to Lamb. Intermediately, we have Pope and his friends, Cowper, Burns, Gray, Walpole, Lady Montague; a sufficient variety, surely, both of talent and character. We had intended to have drawn up a classification of, and criticism upon, the different sorts of letters, but find the whole matter so handsomely handled in the very first letter of Howell, (Epistolæ-Hoelianæ.) that we insert it instead: "It was a quaint difference the ancients did put betwixt a letter and an oration; that the one should be attired like a woman, the other like a man. The latter of the two is allowed large siderobes, as long periods, parentheses, similes, examples, and other parts of rhetorical flourishes: but a letter or epistle should be short-coated and closely couched; a hungerskin becomes a letter more handsomely than a gown. Indeed we should write as we speak, and that is a true and familiar letter which expresseth one's mind, as if he were discoursing with the party to whom he writes in succinct and short terms. The tongue and the pen are both of them interpreters of the mind; but I hold the pen to be the more faithful of the two. The tongue *in udo posita*, being seated in a most slippery place, may fail and falter in her sudden extemporal expressions, but the pen, having a greater advantage of premeditation, is not so subject to error, and leaves things behind it upon firm and authentic record. Now letters (here comes the division), though they be capable of any subject, yet commonly they are either narratory, objurgatory, consolatory, monitory, or congratulatory. The first consists of relations, the second of reprehensions, the third of comfort, the two last of counsel and joy." Then follows some very just and severe criticism:

Hosted by Google

"There are some who, in lieu of letters, write homilies; they preach when they should epistolize (and it is easier to do the former than the latter); there are others that turn them to tedious tractates." Howell, himself, the earliest of our letter writers, is a capital fellow in his way; but he has not mentioned all the varieties of letters. There are the precise letters of business, and the ardent love letters; to a third and disinterested person, both of these are not only indifferent, but even tiresome. The purely literary letter is not mentioned, *i. e.*, that in which topics of literature and the characters of authors are discussed; mere letters of compliment, or formal civility, are not recognised, nor lively, gay epistles, that turn upon nothing.

Some persons keep no letters by them. Hazlitt destroyed all he received: a very poor compliment, we think, to a clever correspondent, to say nothing of the letters of a valued friend. Others hoard up every scrap of a note; this is as wrong in a different way. Many indifferent communications are received, but the choice correspondence is of another character. Shenstone speaks somewhere of the melancholy pleasure he took of a rainy day when his spirits were low, in reading over the old letters of a dear friend.

This retrospective pleasure is truly a melancholy one. Turning over the precious file, we encounter the affectionate protestations of one who has cruelly deceived us, of the generous praises of a now bitter enemy. We read the prophecies of those who early loved and appreciated us, and who can now confirm their past predictions. Time returns anew; the present is merged in the past, and scenes long gone by revive to memory's view! Ah! could we but recall those feelings to which we received such a sympathetic reponse, those "hopes and fears, an undistinguishable throng;" could

Hosted by Google

but the veil of years be removed, and youth and hope and innocence be revealed, then indeed might an Arcadian age commence, and the whole world look green and happy. It is well and profitable to the observer of human nature, and the self-student, to re-peruse his collection of letters, and if he can procure them, to study his own. Viewed in connection with passing events, they form an unbroken narrative, and manifest the progress of tastes and sympathies, improvement in virtue, and accessions of knowledge. The didactic letters, the letters of business, of contention, of mere scandal, may be safely burned; but the memorials of affection, the evidences of friendship, are not to be lightly treated, but, dear as the apple of the eye, to be held among the richest treasures of the author, the thinker, and the man.

XXIII.

POPE AND HIS FRIENDS.

The character and habits of mind of the poet, *par excellence* "of Anna's reign," are vividly depicted in his correspondence. Writing to his nearest friends, and on the most solemn themes, Pope never forgot his authorship. His fame was too much in his eye, and the opinion of the public, in his mind. His characteristic refinement, delicacy of judgment, his nicety of expression and neat turns of style, appear on every page. The virtues of the man, too, admirable and as real as the merits of the wit, satirist, and moral-painter, in spite of his

Hosted by Google

affectation and passion for intrigue and stratagem, are equally evident. His affections and regard for his parents; his devotion to his friends; his sincere humanity; his generous sensibility. The personal character of Pope, owing to his brilliant literary success, and to his success chiefly in satire, is not so well or so favorably known as it should be. He is thought by many to have been what he was humorously styled, and as falsely as humorously, "the little wasp of Twickenham." So far from indulging mean spite and malice, the heart of Pope was of the noblest texture, and its impulses governed by the most exalted sentiments. If ever there was a true-hearted and magnanimous nature, in default of his crooked ways and unwise circumlocutions, it was Pope's. To Pope was addressed not only the hollow, courtly speeches of the titled and great, but the sincerest praises of England's finest wits and most delicate geniuses were accorded to Pope, and Pope was loved and honored, as well as admired and praised. He secured the personal affection of men, not only of talents equally fine and attic with his own, but in some walks superior, and whose own natures and tempers were above all praise. Only survey the list of Pope's intimate associates: Addison, Swift, Gay, Berkeley, Bolingbroke, Steele, Arbuthnot, Parnell, Wycherly, Congreve, Garth, Jervas, Fenton, Hugh Bethel, Ralph Allen, Rowe, and Sir William Trumbull, Secretary Craggs, Earls Halifax and Burlington, Bishop Atterbury, the Blounts, the Digbys, Cromwell, and the fine ladies of the day. It may be safely hazarded as a general remark, that not a single distinguished man of letters or public character in the kingdom was unknown to Pope. He was regarded, and justly, as the Horace and Voiture of England united, and for exact justness of thought and propriety of language, for wit (the like of which we have not

Hosted by Google

since seen), for comic fancy, and for exquisite compliment, he was unrivalled—but chiefly as a moral satirist and judge, equally of books and artificial life, was he considered admirable, and in these walks he is decidedly a master.

Pope was as precocious in his prose compositions as in his poetical attempts. His early correspondence was almost all of it written before the age of twenty. At sixteen, he commenced his correspondence with Wycherly, then near seventy, and, it must be confessed, Pope has the best of the bargain. Shortly after, he wrote to Walsh and Henry Cromwell, his early friends and flatterers. With Wycherly Pope maintained a perfect war of compliments, and yet, after all, they quarrelled from Pope's plain speaking, when he was forced to it. Walsh, whom Dryden called the best critic in England, early favored Pope, and augured the most brilliant success for him. Pope has not forgotten to number him among the catalogue of his early associates. We cannot resist quoting the fine lines, often as they are referred to:—

> "But why then publish? Granville, the polite,
> And knowing Walsh would tell me I could write;
> Well-natured Garth, inflamed with early praise,
> And Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays;
> The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read,
> E'en mitred Rochester would nod the head,
> And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before),
> With open arms received one Poet more.
> Happy my studies, when by these approved!
> Happier their author when by these beloved!
> From these the world will judge of men and books,
> Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks."

What might not the richest fool give for an epithet of

Hosted by Google

praise from such a pen! what higher honor for the author, but to see his name on the same page with that of Pope, though his be at the bottom and the Horace of England very near the top!

Henry Cromwell affected to be a critic (we should judge he was a man-of-the-world sort of scholar from his letters,) and Pope discusses with him questions of taste and criticism, the Latin poets, versification, etc. He devotes a letter to Crashaw, in this part of his correspondence, which abundantly proves how little Pope really comprehended the genius of that noble poet.

Pope early courted the great, much as he afterwards affected to despise them, and we find him writing to Sir William Trumbull, and Craggs, Secretary of State, as well as to several court ladies, the style of whom he has admirably parodied in his letter in the style of a lady of quality. Our anthor's correspondence with ladies, when he was young, he afterwards used to contemn as puerile efforts; and yet, trifling as they are, many a modern gallant of middle age might be happy to hit the frivolous style so well, which was current at that time. The prose letters of Pope to women certainly convey a very mean opinion of their understanding, though couched in elegant phrase, and hidden under the folds of his "polite, insinuating style." But some of his poetic epistles to ladies are beyond all praise, as that masterpiece of refinement and delicacy, the epistle to Miss Blount, with a copy of Voiture's epistles. Each couplet contains the rarest essence of grace and wit, and elegant sentiment, at times rising into brilliant rhetoric, and the whole poem is compacted and moulded with all the art, and in the most ingenious form of the master of poetic form, and all the technicalities of his vocation. There were among the throng of courtiers,

Hosted by Google

however, patrons worthy of the name, and nobles deserving the title. Oxford and Halifax, Craggs and Atterbury, sank the minister in the friend, in their intercourse with Pope, and delighted to relieve themselves from the cares of state in a genial intimacy with the poet at his rural villa. But the true friends of Pope, as indeed the truest friends of every author, were his fellow-scholars and brother authors. Let envy and malevolence declaim as they may, true men of sense and genius, the world over, recognise a brother in each other, and band together for the preservation of social harmony and intellectual freedom. We care little for the lords and ladies of Pope's acquaintance; but who does not delight in his letters to Gay, and Jervas, and Fenton, and (to leave the society of authors, but not of good men) to those noble specimens of human nature, Hugh Bethel and Ralph Allen? Pope mistook his own nature when he turned courtier. He had too much heart for the character. How different are his cold, cautious compliments to the great, whom he loved not, from the delicious flatteries, the fruit of rich affections and high appreciation, he was accustomed to lavish on his nearest friends! To dwell but lightly on his faults, there was a tinge of insincerity in Pope; we imagine, however, rather a vacillation of opinion than any settled duplicity of intention. We think we see signs of this in his correspondence with Addison, who, it must be confessed, was himself too suspicious, and in one instance treated Pope in an unwarrantably deceitful manner. Pope appears to have had less connection with Steele, a man of much greater frankness and candor than his associate. Jervas, the painter, was a life-long friend of Pope, who studied the art of portraiture under him, but never carried it to any perfection. His poetical portraits were certainly fine enough for any reasonable ambition. In his epistle to

Hosted by Google

Jervas, a meet companion for his fine letter to Miss Blount, Pope exclaims:

> "Alas! how little from the grave we claim!
> Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name."

Posterity has preserved the names embalmed in Pope's immortal strain, but has thrown by, in her lumber-room of obscurity, the portraits of Jervas. Swift and Gay, Bolingbroke and Peterborough, are the chief names that remain among the correspondents of Pope. With these most opposite characters, the one pair composed of a man, harsh, austere, and sour, yet manly, friendly and firm; the other, in wit, a man, simplicity, a child; wise and innocent, penetrating, yet volatile, a poet, philosopher, courtier, and dupe: the other couple, a fashionable sceptic and a military wit, but wise and keen observers, accomplished gentlemen, men of wit, men of the world, men of action, Pope lived not only on terms of perfect amity, but in the unreservedness of brotherhood; nay more, for brothers are not always the nearest friends. The Vicar of Laracor, the keenest of satirist, the manliest of misanthropes, appears in his letters to Pope in his most attractive phase. He writes even with an honest sensibility, without a particle of mawkishness. To Gay he writes like a loving, but prudent father, beseeching that imprudent man of genius to lay aside his hundred and one schemes, and nurse his little fortune. Gay died in middle age, and therefore never knew what it was to want the comforts of life in an old age of poverty and friendlessness. Arbuthnot was the idol of Swift. He thus writes of him, with mingled admiration and humor: "Oh, if the world had but a dozen Arbuthnots in it, I would burn my travels! But, however, he is not without a fault. There is

Hosted by Google

a passage in Bede, highly commending the piety and learning of the Irish in that age, where, after abundance of praises, he overthrows them all by lamenting that, alas, they kept Easter at the wrong time of the year. So our doctor has every quality and virtue that can make a man amiable or useful; but, alas, he has a sort of slouch in his walk! I pray God protect him, for he is an excellent Christian, though not a Catholic."

Lamb valued Pope most for his refined compliments. His prose flattery is not so fine as his poetic eulogy; but it is very elegant. In a letter to Cromwell, he says: "You are so good a critic, that it is the greatest happiness of the modern poets that you do not hear their works" (alluding to his deafness). To Jervas he concludes a letter thus: "Come thou, and having peopled Ireland with a world of beautiful shadows, come to us and see with that eye, which, like the eye of the world, creates beauties by looking on them." To the same painter he writes: "I hope the spring will restore you to us, and with you, all the beauties and colors of nature.

Pope's affectionate disposition shines through all his works, but we do not recollect a more striking instance than the following in a letter to a correspondent whose name is withheld. "I cannot express how I long to renew our old intercourse and conversation; our morning conferences in bed in the same room, our evening walks in the Park, our amusing voyages on the water, our philosophical suppers, our lectures, our dissertations, our gravities, our reveries, our fooleries, our what not!

"This awakens the memory of some who made a part in all these. Poor Parnell, Garth, Rowe! You justly reprove me for not speaking of the death of the last; Parnell was

Hosted by Google

too much in my mind, to whose memory I am erecting the best monument I can. What he gave me to publish was but a small part of what he left behind him; but it was the best, and I will not make it worse by enlarging it; I would fain know if he be buried at Chester or Dublin; and what care has been or is to be taken for his monument, etc. Yet I have not neglected my devoirs to Mr. Rowe: I am writing this very day his epitaph for Westminster Abbey. After these, the best-natured of men, Sir Samuel Garth, has left me in the truest concern for his loss. His death was very heroical, and yet unaffected enough to have made a saint or a philosopher famous. But ill tongues and worse hearts have branded even his last moments as wrongfully as they did his life, with irreligion. You must have heard many tales on this subject; but if ever there was a good Christian without knowing himself to be so, it was Dr. Garth." Thus nobly did Pope vindicate his friends, absent or dead. Unlike our modern Damons, he did not from a warm friend become a bitter enemy, but preserved through life his ancient regard with all the steadfastness of a true man. A regulating Providence will preserve the fame of Pope fair and unsullied by the breath of malice or the tongue of slander; the just recompense of a pure heart and a trusting spirit.

Contemporary with Pope, "the cynosure of neighboring eyes," the centre of an admiring circle, "the glass of fashion and the mould of form," a wit, an authoress and a fine woman, lived the celebrated Miss Pierrepont, more generally known under the name and title of Lady Mary Wortley Montague, one of the idols of Pope's idolatry, and indisputably the cleverest woman of her age. The reign of Queen Anne, and the period circling about that epoch, of about thirty-eight years, from the commencement of the reign of

Hosted by Google

King William III. to the end of the reign of George I., was, we are inclined to suspect, the transition period (to employ a fashionable phrase) in the estimation of female character. Before that day women had not attained their just position in the social state, and since that time they have met with a truer regard and a more intelligent homage than even in the days of knighthood and chivalry, when a lady meant rather a fanciful abstraction of virtue and beauty, made only for worship and extravagant adulation (insincere and therefore heartless, and consequently insulting), than "a perfect woman nobly planned," "a phantom of delight," a genial, loving, household companion and help-mate, in trial and adversity. Pope himself and most of his brother wits appear to have held the female mind and the female heart in rather a low estimation, but the characters of women were improving in many particulars. They lost many petty foibles as they shifted the various fashions in dress and manners. The benevolent ridicule of Addison was pointed not only at their patches and their hair-dresses, and rouging, but also at their absurd political partisanship, at their preference of "pretty fellows" to men of sense, at their vacant minds, simpering manners, ill-regulated affections. Swift's pungent satires on fashionable conversation did much; Pope's characters of women effected a greater reform, as if to falsify the satire; but to Addison, and perhaps still more to the gallant Steele, were the ladies mainly indebted. No writers equalled this last pair in administering judicious counsel in a cheerful, gay, graceful manner, by which they charmed those who charmed all the world beside. Public opinion and a better system of education tended greatly to setting the just rights of woman in a proper point of view. The goddess, from a toy and a plaything, the alluring charmer of an idle hour, became a

Hosted by Google

pleasing, modest, domestic, happy woman, enlightened, ennobled, and refined. Such (to take the most favorable instances) we now find her. From a general digression on the state of female society in the reign of Queen Anne to the brilliant representative of the intellectual women of that society, the transition is natural. Lady Montague is not, perhaps, after all, the very best specimen, for she was more the woman of clear, acute intellect, and of fashion, than the quiet wife of pure sentiment and propriety of behavior. She was rather the Aspasia (without her vices, though with her attractions) than the Cornelia of English women—the fine lady, rather than the polished gentlewoman—the ambitious wit, rather than the natural talker. But taking her as she was, she must have been as fascinating in her conversation as agreeable in her letters, and altogether a delightful creature, one disgusting foible, or rather positive defect excepted, which the fastidious reader may comprehend by a reference to the Walpoliana. Lady Montague was almost the first, in point of date, among English female writers, although not recognised as such in her lifetime, none of her compositions having been published until after her decease. Lady Russell, Mrs. Hutchinson, Mrs. Centlivre, Mrs. Behn, Mrs. Manly, and a few obscure writers, had preceded her, but none in her own department had approached her. She is the English Sevigné, unequalled in a gay, sprightly vein, and in easy natural narrative and description. The bulk of her correspondence, letters from Turkey, presents entertaining views of that country, as a book of travels. She had the most favorable opportunities of obtaining information (her husband being the English ambassador at the Sublime Porte), and made diligent use of them. From that country also she derived the practice of inoculating children for the

Hosted by Google

small-pox, by which humane intervention she has entitled herself to the praise of patriotic humanity. With all her wit, and she had a large share; in the very face of her beauty, which was extreme; excluding her authorship; applauding her charitable exertions; we are repelled by a strong tinge of the masculine in her character. A vigorous mind left its imprint upon her disposition and manners. The strong understanding admitted coarseness of allusion and freedom of style. Her descriptions are luxuriant to voluptuousness; the atmosphere of the harem is painted *couleur de rose*. Vividness of fancy is perhaps inconsistent with delicacy of taste, and strong conceptions with unimpassioned beauty of painting. The woman loses what the wit gains, and we feel that we had rather admire the beauty and applaud the wit, than take the woman to our heart for the journey of life. A brilliant evening in a splendid crowd can never make amends for mornings of lassitude and ennui, and years of dull, cheerless, uncompanionable repinings and moodiness. Age steals the roses from the cheek of beauty, and bereaves the woman of the world of all her charms. Wit is clouded and grows blunt in the passage of years, while the heart of the worldling is approaching more and more closely to a state of moral ossification, by which the soul in time becomes wholly hardened, and the human creature is converted into a petrifaction. We are far from applying the whole of this homily to Lady Mary; but, we believe, we repeat a standard criticism in objecting to a portion of her writings, and to some of her habits and constitutional features.

Hosted by Google

XXIV.

GRAY AND COWPER.

The two best male writers of letters, between Pope and Lamb, were both poets like them, which was almost the sole point of resemblance the four possessed in common. They all had wit, and something of humor, but each differed from his brother bard. Pope's wit was courtly and refined; Gray's, like his taste, fastidious; Cowper's measured and moral, like himself in public, timid and restrained; and Lamb's full of the whimsical crotchets which formed a portion of his individuality and temper.

Johnson has underrated Gray's Pindaric Poems as unjustly as Hazlitt has overrated his letters. There are noble and grand thoughts filled out, and expressed in language ardent and picturesque, in the poems of Gray, and there is a majestic sweep in the pinions of his muse, which he has finely described in his own line of the eagle, "Sailing wide in supreme dominion, through the azure depths of air." He is often cold, but when he warms, he glows. His fire is the genuine afflatus, and no pasteboard imitation or balloon inflation. At times he comes nearer to Milton than any poet since the author of Paradise Lost. But in his letters, elegantly as they are written (the English is remarkably choice for a stickler for the classics), he appears by no means in his fairest guise. His criticisms in many cases are inadequate and careless. He speaks slightingly of Thompson's charming poems, just then out. He relishes Gresset, however, and speaks with respect of Southern. Shaftesbury he anatomises keenly, but with justice. The Greeks and Romans always fare well at his hands, but his contemporaries he has little

Hosted by Google

sympathy for. His humor (his nearest friends thought there lay his forte) would be more readily appreciated if it were less elaborate—a fine humorist and good fellow was spoiled in the pedantic student. For, it must be confessed, Gray was scholastic to pedantry with his characteristic nicety and daintiness. We tire of few things so soon as fastidiousness, for it is impossible to love those whom we cannot satisfy or please. Yet we sympathise with the independence of the man who refused to retain a friendship for Walpole after he had discovered his hollowness and fickle nature; and we cannot but reverence the moroseness and admire the secluded life of one who despised the purse-pride of the wealthy, and from the lofty elevation of his genius looked down upon the arrogance of the great and noble. His spirit had all the vigor, something of the roughness, and an appearance (only an appearance) of the sterility of the hardy plants of the cold North; but like them it bore equally well the heats of July and the snows of December, and in itself containing a source of perennial fruitfulness, outbraved the mocks of jealousy and lived down the scorn of calumny. It still continues in all its original freshness.

The style of Cowper's letters is less elaborately elegant, is simpler and more agreeable than Gray's. He has more of nature. Gray's genius was high, but also ambitious; it lacked naiveté and unforced ease. His art, too, was rich and composite, but not so refined as to be concealed. Cowper's domestic habits, continual living with and among women (while Gray lived only by himself, or with a few friends), his moral bias, his physical indolence and timidity, his religious melancholy, gave a distinct coloring to all his productions. These appeared much more in his poetry than in his prose. In his letters he is cheerful, sometimes gay. His vein of

Hosted by Google

humor is quite unconscious, and the more delightful for that reason. He had, when unbiassed, a fund of most excellent sense, with a clear judgment. His natural feelings were pure as a child's. He seems to have been a man without guile: affectionate, confiding and constant. Yet he had a keen eye for folly, and a talent for moral satire next to Pope, and we are apt to think sincerer. He occasionally sketches a character with brevity and point. He discovers no very rich stores of acquired learning, but much wise reflection.

His quiet life was not without its experience and hours of contemplation. He loved nature, he loved innocent animals, he loved the society of virtuous women, and good men; and he worshipped in truth and with awful gratitude the Being he adored and loved. Cowper was a Christian poet, a rare title of honor. He might have filled a high political station and been soon forgotten. Who now-a-days knows anything of the great lawyer, Lord Cowper? Who is not acquainted with the greater poet, William Cowper? Yet we are far from styling Cowper a great poet: compared with Milton, and Shakspeare, and Wordsworth, he ranks in the second or third class of poets. But he is first in that. He is the poet of domestic life; a moral satirist with generous indignation, but without gall; a Christian psalmist (no hymns are finer than some of his), and a judicious, pure-minded, sweet-tempered, warm-hearted friend, counsellor, and companion. Cowper's English is select and idiomatic. It is as racy as that of many writers more noticed for vigor, and yet it is quite free from the least taint of vulgarity. If he seldom soared very high, he never fell into coarseness; and his style is as free from moral and literary corruption, as his wit is free from acerbity, and his sentiment from affectation. With Cowper we shall conclude,

Hosted by Google

since Lamb has been made the subject of so much delicate criticism and fine writing since his death, that we cannot aim at novelty without disparaging better writers and better qualified judges, because personal friends, than any American writers can pretend to be.

XXV.

AMATEUR AUTHORS AND SMALL CRITICS.

Among the various divisions and subdivisions into which the trade of authorship is divided we recognise two classes; authors by profession, and amateur writers: those who regard study and composition as the business of their lives, and those who look upon them merely as incidental occupations. Now, we all know very well how absurd a thing it would be for a client to ask the services of an amateur lawyer, with an air of confidence in the request, and in the expectation of his faithful attention to business; so, too, with regard to the advice of an amateur physician; and, indeed, the analogy holds in every walk of life. Few do that well "for love" which can be better done for money. If it be true in the common concerns of life, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, it is much more to be so considered when we ascend in the scale of labor, and come finally to that which most tasks the intellect and requires the greatest number of choice thoughts. Purely imaginative employmnnt, invention in fiction, the highest class (and indeed all but the most inferior department of poetry, the *musa pedestris*), must afford more of delight self-centered, and in a good degree independent of

Hosted by Google

pecuniary reward or the glory of a noble fame. Yet even poets cannot live without bread and broadcloth; and so far as their imperishable and spiritual commodities can be paid for, should be remunerated in a princely manner. But in speaking of authors and men of letters in general, we shall except the few grand poets from our remarks, and include rather the mass of good, than the minority of great, writers. We do not intend to comprehend in our list either the barely respectable scribes, who abound now-a-day as thickly as Dogberry's whortleberries; although among amateur authors we must not forget that for one really clever man (not to say man of genius) there are at the least estimate ninety and nine stupid fellows, who assume the cloak of gravity wherewithal to hide the defects of dullness.

A merchant is respected for shrewdness in turning a penny, for the accumulation of a fortune, and yet we hear of the mercenary rewards of authorship, and the base equivalent for the productions of genius: as if the more a man gave the less he should ask; build a palace at less cost than a cottage. At this rate a sign-painter would be entitled to higher pay than Raphael himself; and we might take our strongest arguments that men of genius should be nobly rewarded for their magnificent conceptions and labors, from the simple class of painters. The great old masters lived like princes, and were paid as the great lawyer and surgeon of our own time are paid. Yet they did not become lazy or careless; nor did wealth stifle the fine images of their brains, or palsy the masterly skill of their hands.

Thoughts form the merchandise of the writer, as stuffs and wares of the trader. If the one can convert his stock into current coin as readily as the other, on the mere ground of husbandry he deserves no little credit for his skill. Fame

Hosted by Google

is a noble thing—it cannot be too highly eulogized; but fame alone cannot supply the necessities of physical existence, however it may conduce to the generous expansion of sentiment, the growth of the soul. Neither is the charm of letters as a pursuit, and as a labor that brings its own reward, all-sufficient to sustain the scholar. If his intellectual and sensitive nature are excited and elevated by the trump of fame, or soothed into delight by study and meditation, yet he has another nature to take care of, to neglect which wilfully is to commit a scarcely justifiable suicide.

An amateur in almost every walk is regarded as much inferior to a working member of the craft. A man rarely puts his heart or invests the whole stock of his faculties in a pursuit which he takes up casually to while away an hour or two of an idle day. Such writers do not seem properly ever to become amenable to criticism. You are never sure whether they are doing their best or not; as a member of the fancy might say, they do not appear to *come up to the scratch.* They fence with foils blunted at the end, and dread the naked weapon; or they are like shots who practise with powder only. "These paper pellets of the brain" are too much for them.

In our literary world in this country, there is no lack in point of numbers of amateur authors. They are generally either quiet young men, sons of wealthy men, "who pen a stanza while they should engross;" or else men in the meridian of life, who affect the notoriety of fashionable authorship. They are young poets or middle-aged novelists; writers of essays in reviews, and of sketches for the magazines. Sometimes they translate tales or travels for the weekly extras. They deliver an occasional lecture, and contribute articles for the newspapers. Their names are

Hosted by Google

often better known than their productions; they live in cliques, herd in clubs and coteries, and puff each other inordinately. Their reputation is formed by an echo reverberating their self-praise. When rich, they are the most desperate of critics, as above dependence, and out of the reach of appeal and censure.

There are certain marks by which you may infallibly know the amateur author. He is always declaiming against the pecuniary profits of literature, though we doubt whether he would venture to carry out the same doctrine in matters of business, or in his luxurious recreations of a less spiritual description. He lives on his own estate or income, but on other people's ideas. He gives for love what he pilfers through mean ambition. He is the less conscientious on this point, as his labors bring him in no returns. Yet we have known those who pretend to write only for amusement, to come to that pass as to be not a little solicitous to procure remuneration. Such boasters we have known refused any assistance in their literary schemes; and, not to be harsh, we think they deserve the humiliation, at least, of temporary neglect.

Amateur writers rarely undertake works of length or research; and yet they are very apt to take a writer to task who devotes himself to literary occupation in the minor classic forms of writing. Unable themselves to write good magazine papers, and reading (as they must) many inferior ones, they confuse good and bad together. They endeavor to catch the high tone of criticism, and while mispraising daubs of historical pieces, pass by with ignorant scorn the most delicate miniature sketches of manners, or vivid portraits of character.

They injure the true author, who unites a love for his pro-

Hosted by Google

fession, deep interest in his subject, and an honest independence, with the aim of procuring a sufficient livelihood. If writings are to be procured for nothing, nothing will be paid. Cheapness, not merit, will become the object of publishers, and the deterioration of literature must infallibly ensue. The value of a thing has been stated (somewhat sophistically) to be what it will bring. This has by no means been an universal or a just test in literary productions, for the flimsiest of which the highest prices are paid. What could Bacon get now-a-days if he sent his essays to the magazines? His late (and successful) imitator, doubtless, would realize little more.

Few amateur authors feel any real sympathy for literary men. There is no fellow-feeling existing between the industrious and ardent scholar, and the lively voluptuary and genteel wit. Independence of literary profits causes indifference, and sometimes an ill-concealed contempt. Are the hard toil, the misappreciated aims, the uncertain gains of a writer mentioned, they are heard with coolness, and answered by a shrug. Want of money appears want of moral principle or of respectability. They dread duns, poor authors, unpopular poets. Fame and a garret are the topics of their heartless ridicule. An amateur author is, in a word, an amphibious sort of creature—out of the pale of true writers, and yet classed by all with the mob of scribblers. They decry their own writings, with more of truth than they are aware of; and ironically pronounce their own eulogy in the censure of another. They are bitter bad judges of others; and the most ingenious of egotists. They turn self-tormentors to be idolized by the public: they offer themselves up, on the shrine of their egregious self-love, a willing sacrifice, and in order to propitiate popular regard. To the above sweeping

Hosted by Google

charges, certain exceptions are to be made. Most of the better description of amateur authors would translate better into friendly critics, liberal patrons, and unpretending lovers of literature. In modern times, an amateur author of genius is next to an anomaly. The labors of such a man cannot be repaid by mere popularity. Even the great poets of this century have obtained large sums for their MSS. Scott is a notable instance; but it were well for letters that few amass the fortune of the great novelist. Yet, from Shakspeare to Wordsworth, the poets have been at least comfortably provided for, being gifted with a reasonable share of prudence—an eye to the main chance.

From amateur authors we pass to small critics, a natural transition, as these form a division of the same general class. Like the first, they are rarely writers by profession, though we have Dennises and Giffords in the craft. Generally, the small critic is an unblushing pretender, without the slightest claims to respect. He is to the great critic, the original judge, what the minute philosopher is to Plato or Bacon. He is great in little things, and conversely little in great things. His genius is bent on investigating trifles. He is an ingenious perverter of sense, from blindness at not seeing the printer's blunders, or a rapid writer's slips in orthography. He is strongest in punctuation and prosody. If an editor, he is in moral dread of lively contributors, mistaking a satire on vice for a condemnation of virtue, and a homily on hypocrisy for a burlesque on religion. Of poetry he is the verbal critic, and from his literalness, spoils the beauty of a fine passage because he cannot see the fitness of a choice epithet. Correctness is the height of his ambition. He remarks how many lines in a poem end with a monosyllable, or with a similar termination. He pretends to be skilful in metres and

Hosted by Google

the art of poetry. By this he intends the rules of Aristotle, and Bossu, and Blair, and not the divine instincts of the glorious Afflatus. But he does by no means invariably enunciate his judgment in print: he oftener talks than writes criticism. In a private circle he affects the dictatorship of letters. If he has a relation, a man of talent, he patronizes him as a respectable writer. Trash is his favorite term for all he cannot understand, and especially for all keen satire that he suspects may have a bearing upon himself. He makes the most egregious blunders, saying, this will not last, of an immortal work! or, he will soon break down, of a man whose noble enthusiasm appears to his contracted soul little better than midsummer madness.

The small critic is delighted with petty beauties and the minutest details. He loves still more to carp on petty faults in a great man, and thinks he makes a fine discovery when he meets a trivial flaw. He looks, as it were, through an inverted telescope, and to his eye great objects diminish. He makes great things appear small, and the little less. His ideas are on the descending scale; his eyes contract to a mere point of littleness; he is the critic of Lilliput.

Originality puts him out; boldness he styles extravagance, and acknowledges none but imitative excellence. All inventors he looks upon as arrogant interlopers. He is distrustful of novelty, and apprehends failure in every new scheme. He cannot distinguish between freshness of feeling and affectation. He has a horror of individuality, and will not allow the weight of personal impressions. Strong passion he accounts a weak prejudice, and the sincere convictions of a pure spirit "idols of the cave." Indignation at meanness and a scorn of rascality, he terms "whimwhams and prejudice."

Hosted by Google

As he is a trite critic and a stale theorist, so is he also a false logician. He is, indeed, a mere special pleader. He cavils at literal mistakes, and disputes terms rather than abstract truths. He is a newspaper Thomas Aquinas, or the Duns Scotus of a monthly. Magazines he is apt to hold in supreme contempt, though for his life he cannot write a decent article for one. Voluminous works awe him into silence. Erudition is to him the greatest of bugbears. Lest he should be discovered as an ignoramus, he never pretends to discredit the pretences of pedantry. He swells the train of such by his pomp and boasting. Since he has no genuine acquirements, he cannot distinguish the false wares, and consequently equally applauds the jewel and the mock paste

Small critics may be found among two classes of people, in greater abundance than anywhere else; among so-called sensible people, who have no real pretensions to letters, though they affect to speak critically on all points, and mere bibliographers, makers of catalogues, collectors, booksellers and auctioneers. People of sense in ordinary matters, and men intelligent in their own walk of life, but who have never received any tincture of literature, make the most opinionated of all critics. A carpenter expects to graduate the powers of the human mind, and a stone mason to overthrow one of Ariosto's castles. Thinking to bring everything to a common standard, the illiterate imagine themselves to be as good judges of right and wrong in morals, as of the beautiful and odious in æsthetics. They are keen at a bargain, and confide without doubt in their own decisions on works of genius The same people who talk pertly of Milton and Wordsworth would think it absurd for a blacksmith to attempt to take a watch to pieces. Yet the difference of difficulty, between the two operations, is by no means great. And, after all, the

Hosted by Google

immediate popularity of most writers rests chiefly upon such readers as these; the worthy, fit audience, though few, finally give reputation. Meanwhile, however, the mob of readers follow established names and reigning fashions; they follow their chosen leaders with implicit credulity.

Bibliographic critics are learned in title pages, indexes, editions. Their judgments are traditional; their opinions hereditary. They think by proxy, and talk by rote. One of this sort reads everything and feels nothing; he is a walking catalogue; a peripatetic companion to the library; he knows the names of all the authors that have lived. "In books, not authors, studious is my lord." Yet such is a useful character; a guide to the literary voyager; a conductor of the literary diligence. He is well in his place if he will only remain quietly in it; but the difficulty is to keep him there.

XXVI.

FEMALE NOVELISTS. *

The real genius of the female mind, in two classes of prose fiction, appears to be universally confessed,—in the delineation of the artificial in manners, and the natural in sentiment: in the novel of manners, as Evelina; and in the novel of sentiment, as the Simple Story. Ridicule and pathos, these furnish the appropriate weapons, and occupy the legitimate provinces of the female novelist. In these departments they reign supreme. Manly writers may have at their command a wider vocabulary of indignant sarcasm or exhibit profounder

* 1844.

Hosted by Google

views of character: may paint an absurdity in more glowing colors, and more grotesque forms, or display a superior exuberance of comic fancy; but they cannot trifle with such *abandon* and ease as a female wit: their wit may carry more weight, but it is less bright and cutting than a woman's. Men reason better, but they cannot rally so well, and raillery, in ordinary talk, bears the palm from ratiocination. Masculine satire is best adapted for dissection of character and real things, and not so well fitted for depicting mannerisms. Women observe and note all the varieties of the genus odity, more readily than men; and with a certain instinctive nicety of taste and discrimination, they describe the varying and almost imperceptible shades of manners. From an educated sense of propriety in behavior, and the restraints of decorum and etiquette, they are rendered more critical judges of the nice observances of polite breeding, and the opposite gaucheries of an impolite or rustic bearing. Mere external minutiæ engage their attention so much as to beget an almost pedantic regard for certain forms of society, and a horror of all solecisms, which they almost rank with criminal offences. They are, for this reason, perfectly at home either in criticising or describing the persons or events of a ball-room, the boudoir, theatre, concert, or saloon. With a quick eye they note each and every deviation from the existing code of fashion, whether it be in dress, manners or conversation. So much for the satirical powers of the sex.

A similar analogy holds in respect to the talent for sentimental description. Great poets, like Shakspeare, and painters of man, as Fielding, for instance, deal more with the passions than the sentiments, which require finer *handling*, to borrow a phrase from the artist. A middle range, between high passion and indifference, the pathos of domestic tragedy,

Hosted by Google

the prose imagination of the poet, depicting scenes of ordinary or even of humble life, appear to fall within the sphere of female genius. Few masculine writers (even among poets) have done full justice to the noblest specimen of the female character, whilst, at the same time, it must be confessed that no female painter has ever been able to grasp very many traits of the characters of men, or to realize the immense discrepancies between the different ranks. The best women are ignorant, practically, of the lowest forms of humanity (still noble in the most utter degradation); and those who are such cannot throw any light upon the subject from their own pens. Whole classes of society are thus excluded from the vision of the fair author, and the motley manners of many men. We have had no female Ulysses or Homer. At the same time there is, nevertheless, a wide field to be explored, of private history and domestic life. There are the manifold windings of the female heart to be threaded (an Arachne's web); there is the beautiful nature of childhood to unfold, the growing beauty of the womanly maiden; and the proper audience (of readers) is composed of characters of the same stamp, sweet children, innocent girlhood, fair virginity, womanly beauty, inspiring love. From the bud to the full-blown flower, from her offspring (with its opening mind and inquisitive tongue), to the lovely creature that bore it, a precious burden; from these come the lessons of life, to these they are properly addressed, and by one of themselves. Yes! women write for women, and so they should: let men explore the baser parts of human nature; let it be their business (a hateful task) to torture the guilty soul into penitence, religion, and virtue. It is for women to weave garlands of immortal beauty for the brow of goodness and happy duty; and to wreathe chaplets for the crowning graces of the con-

Hosted by Google

fiding, the affectionate, and the pure. By way of illustrating the above remarks, we shall, in particular, proceed to notice the fictions of Madame d'Arblay and Mrs. Inchbald, who stand foremost in the two classes we have undertaken to describe. We shall reserve a page or two for Mrs. Sheridan and Miss Bremer, not forgetting an incidental notice of other female writers of eminence in the same department.

First, however, of the two classical painters we mentioned, the latter of whom we place at the head of all female novelists and prose writers, for qualities both of head and heart, which rarely meet in union. Many of our fair readers may have to be told that these capital writers were the peculiar favorites of their day; though we dare to say that by the class for whom their works were written and appropriately addressed, they are almost entirely unknown. This is more particularly the case with regard to the present generation of readers. Old ladies and ladies of a certain age, have thumbed Camilla and the Simple Story, aye, and well. Yet, while the modern lady has every new novel on her table, we seldom see the Simple Story; never Nature and Art, more frequently Evelina, and Cecilia hardly at all. We trust these suggestions may not be wholly profitless, but induce a return to those standard productions, not only unsurpassed but unequalled by any attempts of the kind at present. None of the fashionable novelists of our present era can hit off a city fop like Miss Burney, or melt the heart with no unfeigned emotion like the creator of Miss Milner, and Dorriforth, and Sandford. There is a smartness, a shrewdness of observation in the authoress of Evelina, to which neither Lady Blessington, nor Mrs. Gore, nor any writer of her school, can lay any pretensions. Neither do we possess in English, at the present moment, a writer who can excite our indignation of

Hosted by Google

time-serving in the bishop, and hypocritical severity in the unjust judge; who can quicken our admiration of fortitude, patience, and noble generosity, or smite the heart with a weight of melancholy anguish at the untimely fate of the poor victim of sin in power and "the pride of place," as the admirable writer of Nature and Art. The more popular material of which Miss Burney's works are composed may have preserved them from oblivion, but the matter is of an inferior cast.

She is perfectly successful where only smartness and shrewd perception are requisite. In the philosophy of the heart, she is quite deficient. Affectation, conventional propriety, and mawkish sensibility, usurp the place of real modesty and genuine feeling. Her forte lies in ridicule of ignorant assumption, and especially of cockney pretensions. She is the satirist of Cockayne, and dwells so much in this region, that we are apt to suspect it to be her favorite locality. A writer or talker rarely rises above an absurdity which he or she is continually harping upon; and affected disgust not unfrequently conceals a genuine sympathy. The painter of the Branghtons had something of the same narrowness of views and petty ambition that distinguished her fictitious characters. And what we always inferred, from the internal evidence of her works, we find abundantly confirmed in the memoirs of this clever woman, lately published, in which it is almost inconceivable to discover what a compound of small sins represented the social nature of Miss Burney. A moral coxcomb, a pedantic courtier, an affected wit, an insipid companion, her autobiographical notes, can leave no other impression than that of inspiring an honest contempt for this frivolous, flattered, yet enslaved, minion of fortune. If this criticism appear harsh, we appeal directly to the volumes

Hosted by Google

in question, where the data for a correct judgment are abundant.

We would speak and write in quite a different tone of that peerless woman, Mrs. Inchbald—admirable not only for her writings, but also for her personal character and the beauty of her daily life; an actress of fascinating beauty and attractive grace, yet

> "Chaste as the icicle,
> That's cruded by the frost from purest snow,
> And hangs on Dian's temple:"

amid the splendid temptations and pleasures offered by the admirers of the stage to its heroines; a noble-hearted woman struggling with poverty to accumulate a comfortable independence for her poor relations; sitting without a fire, the cold winter through, to procure fuel for a sister—an act of Christian charity worthy of a saint; and, in her entire conduct, exhibiting a spirit of love and self-denial that cannot be too highly lauded. Neither should we forget her greatest fault, most pardonable and innocent in her, the early coquetry with which she has been charged, and some of the romantic freaks of her girlish days, recorded by the dullest of biographers, the dull and voluminous Boaden. Her later romance was of a deep and melancholy cast; her love for a married man, Dr. Warren, in its whole history, pure and unsullied, and her grief at his death. Leigh Hunt has done noble justice to her life and memory, in a paper of the Seer. Her writings were fresh draughts of vivid experience of life. We apprehend a portion of early biography, in parts of the career of Miss Milner and the inflexible, yet benevolent, Sanford, is a portrait instinct with truth. Mrs. Inchbald has, in our judgment, surpassed all females writers in delineating the

Hosted by Google

passion of love, as it is frequently seen; and though more elevated or more profound masters of the human heart could, unquestionably, surpass any attempt of hers to display the whole resources of the passion in men, yet no masculine writer could, by any possibility, excel in fidelity, naturalness and exquisite discernment, the finished portrait of Miss Milner, the capricious, affectionate, coquettish, yet obedient, ward; the half-spoiled child of fortune, at last humbled to the dust and breathing out the last sighs of penitence, attended by the friend and censor of her youth. All the characters in the Simple Story are admirably drawn; the haughty and austere Dorriforth; that noble, rough, true Christian, Sandford, a severe censor while he thought censure called for, but melting with benevolence at the sick bed of the repentant worldling. Miss Woodley is one of the most sensible and truly feminine of our author's characters. "Nature and Art" should be read by every young man and woman, impressing, as it does, an indignant scorn of the current hypocrisies, the legalized villany, the conventional morality of men of the world, and of the customs of society. The style and execution of these novels is classic; graceful and fluent, a study and a model. The supreme power of the author lies in pathetic situation and nobleness of sentiment, alternately. Few scenes in any work of fiction can compare, for deep interest, with the trial scene in the second novel. As a beacon to those captivated by the fame of a fashionable coquette, we recommend the sad history of the ill-fated Miss Milner. To encourage the love of virtue, we would point to the characters of the elder and younger Henry (father and son). In a word, the moral value of these admirable works is, at least, equal to the breathless interest they excite as works of fiction.

Hosted by Google

Several female writers maintain a respectable rank in the same department with the two writers whose merits have been above discussed; whilst there are others excellent in an inferior grade. Amongst forgotten writers and books, we may mention the History of David Simple, by a relation of Fielding (if we are not mistaken), and a woman of fine sense and feeling, the mistress of a refined and simple style; the pleasing fictions of the authoress of Emily Montague, and Sidney Biddulph, a novel by Mrs. Sheridan, the wife of Dr. Johnson's old rival, the niece-in-law of Swift's friend, and the mother of Richard Brinsley. Dr. Johnson is reported to have said of this lady, that she had hardly a right to make her readers suffer so much: that he thought she exercised her power of raising the feelings of compassion and sympathy for the distresses of others to too high a pitch.

The great number of female novelists, during the present century, is a feature in the literary character of the age to be noted. To run over the mere names would prove a tedious and profitless labor; but we may advert to a few—the strong, practical sense of Edgeworth, adapted to moral tales for the young—of Opie and Moore to impress religious principle as well. The pleasant village histories of Mitford; the shrewd speculations (best in her early sketches) of Martineau; the wild and brilliant imagination of Mrs. Shelley, and the more quiet and agreeable attempts of Mary Howitt (the English Sedgwick). From a large number of elegant-minded female writers of our own country, we may select two women of pure genius, as the best examples of American female talent, Miss Sedgwick and Mrs. Kirkland, women of whom any country might be proud.

Since writing the above, we have fallen upon, by the merest chance, a copy of Sidney Biddulph, to which we must

Hosted by Google

devote a page or two, worthy as it is of a much more extended notice. This is an admirable novel of the serious kind, a true picture of domestic life, and fraught with a certain classic grace, by a remarkably sweet and elegant woman, who deserves to be much better known. As a mere specimen of style and artful narrative, it is worthy of preservation, to say nothing of the deeply interesting incidents of the story and the varied characters themselves. Yet, for our own part, we read the book less for the story and plot than for the sentiment and reflections it contains; and, in general, we care little for the very portion of a prose fiction that most interests the majority of readers. It is for this reason, among others, we are such admirers of Miss Bremer's novels, which are voted tame by lovers of the stimulating and highly-wrought tales of blood and terror. A sensible old sea captain of our acquaintance thinks some portions of the Swedish novels are even "puerile;" and an acute, most discerning legal gentleman can see nothing at all in them. Ah! better to read a chaptar of simple domestic history than records of crime and violence. By morbid sympathy, a weak mind readily becomes a convert to admiration of desperadoes aud captivating villains; while, by a natural and healthy process, the virtuous mind receives new vigor from pure thought and the unambitious details of contented domesticity. An intellect that has become enfeebled by the extravagant demands upon it of Spagnialetto painters of vice and wretchedness, is nourished and strenghtened by scenes of rational happiness and examples of retiring and private nobleness. The moral of Sidney Biddulph is one by no means agreeable to the mere novel-reader, or to one ignorant of life, who invariably expects to see virtue rewarded and vice punished, either at the end of a play or a novel, or at the conclusion of this human existence;

Hosted by Google

but a very mortifying yet most just conclusion, so neatly expressed by the authoress herself, that we borrow her language, "that neither prudence, forethought, nor even the best disposition that the human heart is capable of, are, of themselves, sufficient to defend us against the inevitable ills that sometimes are allotted even to the best;" or, as Shirley despondently sings, "there is no armour against fate!" more wisely, perhaps, we should say Providence, that "bringeth good out of evil."

We have alluded to Miss Bremer: it were an act of injustice to do no more, and we feel it a matter of duty to add our slight tribute to the incense wafted across the wide ocean to that northern land of the Sagas, of Vasa and Adolphus, of Oxenstiern and Christina, of Charles XII. and Bishop Tegner. This we gladly pay. Miss Bremer is the most prominent writer of the day, in her peculiar department of fiction in pictures of home-life and domestic manners, lively and genuine. Her admirable Swedish novels are not only national works, but fitted for all lands. This admirable writer has been compared to Miss Edgeworth, whom she surpasses in sentimental description and delicate fancy. The Swedish novelist is a livelier and more dramatic painter than the Irish wit, who is a woman of sound, rather than of fine, sense. Miss Bremer is much the deeper writer, sees further into human nature, has more versatility; sometimes startling and philosophic, yet, in general, cheerful and piquant; a moral poet of the fireside, with some resemblance to Cowper and the homelier pathos of Wordsworth. Her "musa pedestris" is heightened, not unfrequently, by an infusion of German fancy, and deepened by the serious and noble thoughtfulness of that melancholy Northland. Though the scenery, the landscape, the background of the Swedish novels is comparatively new

Hosted by Google

to us, known only before in the pages of the magnificent Tegner and the tasteful Longfellow, yet the characters are as familiar as those we meet every day.

Who has not known personages of age, distinction, and family, like the President, the Colonel, the Judge, conservatives of the best class, sticklers for dogmas and usages? yet men of clear heads, obscured by few prejudices of education or society—respectable characters, worthy citizens; all little fitted for our country, in a political point of view, since they form timid statesmen and with habits of narrow diplomacy. Then, again, we have often seen headstrong cornets, pining students, romantic schoolmasters, like the heroes of the second rank in the same works. The old ladies are equally well made out—whether stately widows of condition, the relicts of distinguished officials; old maids, chatty and active; or matronly dames, most worthy and excellent. The young women generally partake of the species Sylphide, and have a certain aerial grace and softness. In each novel, we have to remark the recurrence of these different types of character. The writer herself generally figures as the relator: in the Neighbors, she is the doctor's wife; in the President's Daughters, she is the Governess; in all, she is a friend of the family, and ranks as one of the useful and agreeable among the poorer relations.

A wide range of character and variety of situation and incident, mark the Swedish novels, which, besides the higher qualities we have claimed for them, are extremely agreeable for the essay-matter, the speculation and thought they contain, no less than for the playful humor and genial Flemish distinctness which characterize the same scenes. The beauty of naturalness we further notice, and of characters for the most part, one cannot avoid liking or sympathizing with. In

Hosted by Google

the last, Strife and Peace, we do not recollect a harsh (not to say worthless) character.* This, for many readers, is an advantage. The student of human nature must see all men; but many should learn only the best characters, as they want strength and penetration to see the good in the evil. The end, the tone, the moral of these works is pure and healthy; with no vitiating influences, no corrupting suggestions. But most excellent, if only read to cherish right and noble feelings, and confirm good and high principles.

Mrs. Emily Flygare (is not this possibly a *nom de plume*, or synonyme of Bremer?) is a writer of precisely the same quality and grade. The Professor's Favorites is a fair match for the President's Daughters; though perhaps not equal to the Neighbors or Home. Miss Austen is another British authoress with whom Miss Bremer has been compared. They resemble each other certainly in the fact, that they are both writers of the domestic novel, as it may be called; yet Miss Austen is quite deficient in the strikingly poetical qualities which relieve even the homliest details of the Swedish novels. She is quite prosaic, and if possible a little exclusive; perhaps too much taken up with titled personages. Though decorous, proper, sensible and judicious, where do you find in her novels, the vivacity, the humor of the Neighbors or Home? The depth of feeling in these works, as well as in the Strife and Peace, can nowhere be paralleled in Prejudice or Mansfield Park.

To the two prominent names in American female authorship, we should have added that of Mrs. Childs, a pure, sweet, amiable writer, whose philanthropy is unbounded and carried out in deeds of practical benevolence. The produc-

* The Colonel can hardly be called one of the characters, as he plays no part, soon leaves the scene, and is altogether only passive.

Hosted by Google

tions of this lady are conceived in the most genial spirit, and executed with equal beauty and facility.

We have said, women write for women; we should further remark that there is a race of masculine writers, with feminine delicacy of mind, who ought to be added to the list of novelists for a lady's reading. Such are the exquisite sentimental painters, Richardson, Marivaux, Mackenzie, Jean Paul and Goldsmith. These are peculiarly authors for women. Rousseau, Sterne and Goethe, equal masters of the female heart, and whose works contain the purest essence of ethereal sentiment, are dangerous writers, inasmuch as their works are fraught with deleterious influences, which require a strong intellect and a vigorous moral sense to withstand.—American literature can point to three names of the first rank of excellence in this way of writing, Dana, Hawthorne, and Washington Irving. We reverse the usual order of merit, as we conceive Mr. Irving to be much inferior, in this respect (abundantly made up by his humor, power of description, narrative, and researches), to the first and second writers, who are so much less known. Dana has a vein of fresh, original, deep feeling—at times most powerful in its expression, and always strong and simple—while Irving's best sentiment is borrowed from Mackenzie and Goldsmith. Paul Felton, Edward and Mary, the Son, are much superior to anything of the same kind in Irving. Dana has a deeper as well as a more original genius: yet the exquisite comic pictures of Irving are quite out of the reach of the more serious writer. Hawthorne is a true poet and admirable writer—what fancy, what deep melancholy, what invention, what pure, cheerful gladness, what pictures, in his delightful tales! He can excite almost terror, and almost mirth: hovering ever between the two. And his style! a mountain-spring is

Hosted by Google

not more limpid and transparent: his genuine Faith, his manly Love, his true Religion, are not to be forgotten. Why does not this choicest of our writers give us more twice-told tales, or a new series of charming historical sketches for children, which all ages may read with pleasure? Who but he can give us the true history of Salem witchcraft, half legend, half sad reality? What stores of romance yet unworked, lie hidden in the early history of New England?

XXVII.

SINGLE-SPEECH POETS.*

A REMARK of Horace Walpole (that most acute judge of the niceties of literature) is set down in the Walpoliana, on this very topic, and which, indeed, had suggested the following illustrations of his criticism. He speaks of writers, who, like certain plants, flower but once—whose poetic genius bloomed early, for a single time, and never again put forth a bud. These writers, in poetry, resemble *single-speech* Hamilton in oratory (the coincidence furnishes the excuse of the caption), and ever remain a source of literary curiosity—a problem not to be readily solved on ordinary premises. It is one of the most curious of all literary curiosities, and yet we do not remember that D'Israeli has devoted a paper to the subject, nor even made any reference to it—an omission quite unaccountable in him, as it falls naturally within his province.

* 1845.

Hosted by Google

A beautiful Anthology might be collected from the writings of poets, who have exhausted themselves, as it were, in a single effort; caught but a single glance of the divinity; but once felt "the god." In a supplement to this exquisite bouquet, richer than that of Ellis or Longfellow, though they come very near to the ideal we speak of, might be included the few fine short poems, of those who have written long works of *mediocre* or perhaps even doubtful standing. A few delicate *morçeaux* of Southey will be preserved by an affectionate race of readers, whose benevolence even cannot prevent the utter oblivion of his unwieldy epical attempts. Even Gay, who wrote well always, has been immortalized by his Ballads and Fables, rather than by his Trivia.

Another class, still, beside the writers of one or more choice short poems, and the writers of long and dull insipid productions, is that of the great writers who have written much, and of whose works, even when equally fine, the shortest are the best known, merely because they are brief. Thus, Dryden's Alexander's Feast is known to many, from being met with in all the ordinary selections and elegant extracts, while his no less admirable romantic tales from Boccaccio and Chaucer, his delightful Fables, Epistles to Oldham, and Congreve, and Kneller (on which Pope could only *refine*), Secular Masque, and his vigorous political satires, are comparatively unknown. Thousands have read, or sung, or heard sung, Young Lochinvar, for the hundreds who have read Marmion. And Moore is the poet of the parlor, for the Melodies he has written, while his Lalla Rookh is read as a critical duty, and by way of task.

According to the above classification, many pleasing versifiers would rank very high among the minor Poets, whose standing is low among the master Bards.

Hosted by Google

As to the philosophy of the matter, we confess it inexplicable. Why one who has once succeeded should not do equally well again, many causes may be assigned; yet not one of them carries sufficient weight to settle the question determinately. The various reasons are sufficiently plausible, yet may be easily set aside on further reflection. Sheer indolence! cries one; timidity, exclaims another: want of leisure, reasons a third; rather, want of power, adds a fourth; perhaps, all together, judiciously concludes a fifth.

Some persons seem to regard these writers—as some old dogmatist called Goldsmith—inspired idiots, who have, by chance, hit upon a new thought or view, which they want skill and training to follow up—as delicious harmonies may float on the mind of one who is ignorant of the science of sweet sounds.

In truth, the fact is as wonderful as that would be (of which we are ignorant, if it has ever happened) of a painter who had finished but one good picture in the course of his life—who had caught for a single time the cordial and kindly aspect of nature—who, once only, had gained power to interpret the soul, speaking in the face. Who ever heard, or read of, or saw, the single celebrated production of a sculptor, or musical composer, or architect, who had anything of a desirable reputation? We do not speak of the clever things done by ingenious amateurs, but of single works (not plays, as Ben Jonson used to distinguish), executed by professional artists.

Yet as matters of literary and personal history, that was really the case of the authors of the Burial of Sir John Moore and the Ode to the Cuckoo. Wolfe wrote two or three other fine things in verse and prose, yet nothing comparable to this master piece. Logan is known only by the ode we refer to.

Hosted by Google

The Braes of Yarrow enshrine the memory of Hamilton of Bangour, and have led greater bards to the scene, to offer up their tributes, still inferior to the first. Why is this all we have of these delicate poets? With such fancy, such feeling, a taste so refined, a versification so graceful, how happens it we hear no more strains from these nightingales of a night? Not wholly so besotted as to be careless of fame; rather, so far from that, as, in the case of Wolfe, to be sensitively alive to generous praise and to noble action; and, as to Logan, we believe he, too, was a clergyman, a retired scholar, and man of pure taste. Both were (if we recollect aright) invalids, constitutionally feeble, and hence incapable of long flights of fancy or close study. They had leisure—poetic impulses could not have been wanting, for subjects and occasions never wholly fail the Muse; the admiration of friends, we may conclude, was theirs. A single obstacle only remains, and that furnishes, probably, the occasion or reason of their silence—a fastidious taste, like Campbell's, who was said to be frightened by the shadow of his fame, that could not be satisfied with anything short of perfection, which it failed to realize. Genuine modesty, and a sensitive temperament, were leading traits (we presume, of course) of the writers. These held their hand, and restrained the otherwise willing pen. The same reasons will not seem to excuse the short poems of Raleigh and Wotton, who feared no critical tribunals; whose minds were braced by manly action; who united all characters and talents and accomplishments; who, with learning and (at some period) leisure, and fancy, and power, have left a very few and very brief copies of verse, worthy of being printed in letters of gold. They were not men, like their later brother bards, to entertain a feeling of despair at ever again equalling the fine

Hosted by Google

things they had accomplished early in life. In them, therefore, it is but fair to suppose, that the poetic bore a slight proportion to the political and scholastic and business-characters, which rendered them famous.

The minds of men change; their aims vary at different epochs. They entertain different views of life, of action, of ambition. Many youthful tastes (the accompaniment of animal spirits, rather than the fruit of settled *inclination*) vanish as men grow older. How many young poets have settled down into middle-aged prose men; how many airy romancers become converted into matter-of-fact critics. Religion, in some instances, teaches (falsely, we conceive) the sin of all but devotional strains: unquestionably, when pure and noble, the highest kind of verse, but not the only allowable form. In this case, too, where piety is perverted, the praises of men appear so worthless and unsatisfactory, that the bard relinquishes the exercise of his divine gift (in a wrong spirit) before men, that he may offer up his praises, pure and unalloyed, with angels and the blessed, to the Almighty Giver of the glorious faculty itself (among innumerable blessings).

Various pursuits, too, warp the imagination from poetical flights, and confine the studies that arise from fancy and taste to a narrow circle, if not consign them over to "dumb forgetfulness a prey." Three great lawyers have been made out of tolerable poets, who might have ranked among the first of the third rank, the Dii Minores of our idolatry—Blackstone, Sir William Jones. and Lord Thurlow; judgeships and bishoprics oblige the holders and occupants of these stations to hide, sometimes, a rare and peculiar talent. Yet some bishops have been wits, as Earle and Corbet: though too frequently the office stultifies the head, while it hardens the heart.

Hosted by Google

Without any further attempt at unravelling the causes of this literary phenomenon, we will at once bring together the following notices of writers of the kind we have undertaken to describe, without pretending (from the nature of the case an almost impossible thing) to produce all who deserve mention. On the contrary, we can promise to quote only a few, as we write from memory, and without the means of extending our list.

To commence with two court poets of the age of Charles II., when "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease," first appeared. *Denham*, the fashionable poet of his day, now ranks as such in the select collections, mainly on the strength of the Cooper's Hill. *Dorset*, one of the most delightful and accomplished characters of that court of wits and gallants, is best known in political history by his ballad, said to have been written at sea during the first Dutch war, 1665, the night before the engagement. He has penned a couple of delightful songs or so, but his poetical claims rest chiefly on the ballad. *Pomfret's* "Choice" stands quite alone; the single popular poem of its author, an agreeable, pleasant piece of versification, presenting the ideal of a quiet, comfortable, retired literary life. Swift's version of Horace's lines is more Horatian, but less English. Cowley and Norris, who both translated the philosophic picture of Seneca, of a similar strain, are more philosophic and high toned, but do not approach so closely the more equal current of daily life. Leigh Hunt has praised Pomfret, and somewhere, we think, directly imitated "*Choice*," adding to the verse a grace of his own. Dr. Johnson passed upon him no more than a just eulogium. To the masculine moralist and the agreeable essayist we bow, in deference to their united judgment. *John Phillips* is famous for his celebrated burlesque of Milton (the "Splendid

Hosted by Google

Shilling"), but we can recollect no other poem of his of anything like equal merit. *Parnell's* Hermit is his *chef-d'œuvre.* Many who know him as a poet, know nothing of his verses to his wife, and one or two other short pieces, almost equally fine. *Blair's* "Grave" (the resting place of Mortality) has made him immortal. *Green's* "Spleen," and *Dyer's* "Grongar Hill," poems excellent in their different styles of manly satire and picturesque description, are, we believe, the only works of these authors that have escaped oblivion. As writers of single poems, we may, by a forced construction, "compel to come in" certain of the old dramatists, and though they do not properly rank under this head, we may be glad to eke out our list by such delights of the muses as the noble Dirge in Webster's terrible tragedy, Shirley's fine stanzas; and scattered songs, "fancies," and "good-nights," that occur in the rare old comedies and tragedies: from Gammer Gurton's Needle, that can boast the first and one of the best drinking songs in the language, down to, and half through, the age of Elizabeth, the age of Marlow and his contemporaries, just previous to the golden era of the Shaksperean drama. Many of the minor poets, whether gay or religious, of the seventeenth century, have left sparkling gems, such as the delicate flowers that blossom in the poetic gardens of Carew, Herrick, King, Vaughan, Lovelace, &c. We had written thus far, when we met with Longfellow's *Waif*, a delicate and tasteful anthology, which, however, should have included a galaxy of rare old poems: the later writers are sufficiently well known.

Certain of the noble old prose writers, to be ranked, by the production of one fine poem—if by no other claim—by title of courtesy, among poets, ought not to be omitted, as *Bunyan*, in the pithy, sententious lines prefixed to his "Pilgrim;"

Hosted by Google

Burton's fine versified abstract of his own "Anatomy; and *Walton's* "Angler's Wish." These are "rarely delicate," as Walton says of Marlow and Raleigh's delicious verses, "better than the strong lines now in vogue in this critical age."

In one department of verse, that of Hymns and the versified Psalms of David, some writers are classic from having produced one or two admirable pieces of the kind; in this class come Addison, Pope, Young, Ken, Cowper, Heber, Wotton.

Many writers, of very considerable pretensions, have succeeded in one long poem, but are not generally known by any second production of equal value. Of this class the best instances are *Young*, in his "Night Thoughts"—hard reading, except in detached passages; *Akenside's* "Pleasures of Imagination" (with all his pomp of philosophic speculation and elaborate fancy, very heavy for these very reasons.) The *Pleasures*, (by the way) of Memory and Hope, in these long *general* poems, are far from pleasant reading; *Churchill*, whose local and temporary satires are forgotten and give place to his "Rosciad," a monument of his sense, acuteness, and happy satire—a gallery of theatrical portraits hit off with the justness and vivacity of Pope, and forming a capital supplement to Colley Cibber's collection; *Allan Ramsay's* "Gentle Shepherd," that Arcadian pastoral; *Garth*, in his "Dispensary," an author in whom the man and humorist was more than a match for the poet; *Somerville's* "Chase," pretty fair verse for a sporting country gentleman; and *Armstrong's* "Art of Preserving Health," a sensible essay that might as well have been written in prose. The same criticism may be applied to Garth and Somerville.

Among general readers the *Hudibras* of *Butler* is eagerly perused by all who delight in the union of sense, wit, and

Hosted by Google

learning, all devoted to the cause and end of wholesome satire; yet the other sharp satires of the same writer are, virtually, unknown. And the *Seasons* of *Thompson*, by no means his best poem, is universally read, while very few ever think of glancing at the delightful "Castle of Indolence," of which he was both the creator and master.

Then again, certain fine poems are continually quoted, not as the sole efforts, but as the masterpieces of their authors, quite to the exclusion of any other works of theirs; the selection, for instance, of such fine poems as the *Ode to the Passions* and the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, in works on elocution, with which every schoolboy is familiar, has thrown the other equally fine pieces by the same authors, comparatively into the shade. *Shenstone's Schoolmistress* comes within the same category; but after all, the fame of the poet depends on it alone. The ballad of Jemmy Dawson is not superior to many that have been consigned to obscurity; while the Pastoral Ballad, with a certain vein of tenderness, does not rank much above Hammond's strain (once called the English Ovid), which has been long since, and not unjustly, forgotten.

A delicate volume might be made up of single poems of English and American poets of *this* century. In English poetical literature, Mrs. Southey's Paupers's Death-Bed, Noels's Pauper's Funeral, delicate verses of Darley, Montgomery's Grave, &c., &c.

Our American Parnassus entertains many occupants, who can prefer but a single claim (or two) for possession. The following are some of the gems we can, at present, recall. The famous song of R. T. Paine, entitled Adams and Liberty, though its poetical value was slight, was the best *paid* copy of verses ever printed here, and exceedingly popular: the

Hosted by Google

spirited "Indian Burial Ground," of Freneau, which Longfellow has lately recovered, and whence Campbell borrowed a line or two. Coke's Florence Vane, Neals's Birth of a Poet, Wilde's My Life is like a Summer's Rose, Pierpont's affecting lines on his dead child, Lindley Murray's charming verses to his wife, Pinckney's spirited and truly poetical songs, Aldrich's Death Bed, Field's Dirge on a Young Girl, Woodworth's Old Oaken Bucket, Eastman's Farmer's Day, &c. But our best fugitive poetry has been written by prose writers. Irving's delicious lines, the Dull Lecture, illustrating, or illustrated by (we know not which), a capital picture of Stuart Newton; and his classic verses to the Passaic River, as graceful and picturesque as that winding stream. C. C. Moore has in a choice volume, among other delicate verses, included three classic poems sufficient to secure a place for their author on the same shelf with Gray, Campbell, and Logan: the capital humorous visit of St. Nicholas—with the verses to the Poet's wife, and the lines to his children, accompanying their father's portrait: verses worthy of Goldsmith. A noble poem on Alaric, by Governor Everett; some fine versions from the German, by the Hon. Alexander Everett; three or four admirable pieces by John Waters; the two last addressed to ladies, printed in the American newspaper, some six or seven years ago. Nicholas Biddle wrote some very agreeable *jeux d'esprit* and *vers de société*. A lively epistle of this kind appeared in the weekly New Mirror last summer. A noble poem, "The Days of my Youth and of my Age Contrasted," by the Hon. St. Geo. Tucker, of Virginia, has been going the rounds of the papers for a year past. Can no printed book or magazine show us more of the author? We often ask ourselves this question, with regard to many other authors, without ever receiving a satisfactory answer. Very

Hosted by Google

many such we still remain in utter ignorance of, in common with the reading public, and this fact must account for our omissions. When we think of the stupid long poems, with which the world has been deluged for years past, and recollect how many exquisite brief pieces are lost merely by their brevity, as a jewel is hidden in a pile of common stones, we often wish that a critical police might be continually kept up, to pound all stray poetical cattle; or, at least, to advertise where they might be found.

XXVIII.

ON PREFACES AND DEDICATIONS.

THE day of prefaces and courtly dedications is well nigh past. The readers of the present generation are generally in too great a hurry to penetrate the inner courts of the Temple of Truth, or oftener of Pleasure, to linger long about the sacred Porch, and are too apt to neglect the formal compliments and elaborate address of the janitor, at the gate. With a disregard and indifference (more especially with us Americans) to the amenities of social intercourse, has also been introduced a carelessness on the part of authors. Rarely we meet a conciliatory poem or an affectionate salutatory; still less frequently we encounter a critical introduction, or argument of the work. Modern society laughs at the studied courtesies of the old school of politeness; and modern critics are equally inclined to ridicule the hyperbolical praises and scholastic introductions of their literary forefathers. But let us discriminate. At the same time that the herd of authors

Hosted by Google

(not very different in the most unpleasant aspects, at any one period from what they are at all others) ran riot in extravagant adulations, and prolix, stupid and tiresome self-eulogium, or worse yet, self-censure, there were writers living who have made the Preface and the Dedication classical provinces of elegant composition; whose skill in spirited portrait and delicate flattery, in the last department, and whose clear, acute, and copious analogies and illustration, in the first, have rendered them indispensable appendages to the works we are accustomed to regard as standards in their class.

A preface may be regarded as having the same relation to the work that follows as a prologue to a play; or when extended and explanatory, as an overture to an opera. It should give the reader the key-note to the book itself, and the harmonies it is supposed to contain. Or else it should, in a bird's-eye view, display the whole scope of the theme, with all its bearings. It should rarely admit of an apologetic tone, and never deprecate the honest severity of just criticism. That is a bad book as well as a feeble character, that *begs* off from a close inspection. There should be no *petitio principii*, no morbid modesty; neither any false fears, nor artful affectations. Its business is to speak the truth, yet not necessarily the whole of the truth. It is well to keep something in reserve; to promise too little rather than too much; to know how to disappoint one's friends the right way.

In the Dedication, the writer makes his bow and presents his compliments; addressing a near friend, or heart's idol (a great author or public character, who stands on an elevation far above him, yet whom he cherishes with an affectionate veneration); and, although the custom is rapidly falling into

Hosted by Google

disuse, it seems to us as disrespectful to the reader for a writer to omit this piece of introductory civility, as it would appear to any well-bred company for a person to enter without saluting any member of it, and depart in the same graceless manner. A similar omission in letters, of an epithet of attachment or regard, strikes us much in the same way as if one stopped another in the street, and fell at once into conversation with him without shaking of hands, a smile, an inquiry after the person's health who is addressed, a passing good-morrow, or even a civil nod. When a man wishes to assume a magisterial air, to write in the imperative or *minatory* mood, he may waive all forms of address. But between friends it is one of the indispensable bonds of connection, and furnishes one of the strongest ties (however slight it may appear) to lasting attachment.

Not to trench further upon the confined limits to which our lucubrations are restricted, we must make an end of these prefatory remarks and come to the point.

In looking through the Index to the first series of the Curiosities of Literature, we remarked a section on Prefaces; and began to think we had chanced upon a topic already exhausted by the learned research and ingenious criticism of the elder D'Israeli. But a reference to the paragraph in question speedily satisfied us how much more had been left for subsequent essayists; that the liberal antiquary had by no means employed a tithe of his resources, had merely indicated a point or two, leaving the multifarious instances for future inquirers to accumulate and dispose. Of what he has written, however (a page or two only), we readily avail ourselves, for who has more justly gained the title of the Literary Antiquary than D'Israeli, and from whose books can our later critics gain a better insight into many curiosities of

Hosted by Google

literature, and the profession of authorship, than from the fragmentary note-books of the same author?

Prefaces, it appears, are no modern inventions. Cicero is said to have kept a volume by him fitted for all sorts of works; a species of assorted common-places cast into the form of an address. Prefaces then, as more lately, even down to the time of Johnson, were written to order, by authors, who wrote only that part of the published book. Some introductions, too, were and have been written which might have answered equally well for any productions of a similar cast. This is well-known of Sallust's introductory paragraphs to his two histories. And, if we are not mistaken in the recollection, Clarendon's preface to his history of the Rebellion might with slight alteration have answered for a narrative of any popular revolution. Sir W. Raleigh's preface might be prefixed to any universal history; and Hooker's to any treatise on ecclesiastical polity, so far as the bearing of the introduction, on the work that follows, is concerned. All of these are, in themselves, intrinsically noble, but with little individuality or close connection with the particular subject.

A friend reminds us that the same criticism may be applied to Voltaire's Preface to his History of Charles XII.; we had forgotton this instance, but adopt it on the testimony of a witness so likely to be correct. Many other examples, e dare say, might be produced; but a few are sufficient.

If we were to fix an era when prefaces might be said to be emphatically in fashion in England, we should be obliged to include a couple of centuries at least; from the beginning of the reign of James I. to the end of the reign of George III. We might commence nearly a century earlier, but restrict ourselves within pretty well defined limits. A book pub-

Hosted by Google

lished at that period, whatever its character or pretensions, without a preface of some description, or a dedication of some kind, might have been regarded as an anomaly. With this necessary requisition, it was not expected, however, that all prefaces and all dedications should be cast in the same mould. It was enough, if the usual form and style of the one, and the customary spirit and length of the others, were observed. It is curious, therefore, to remark the variety of styles, and the difference of manner. Flattery wore a number of elegant disguises, from the magnificent hyperbole of Bacon to the easy grace of Steele. Criticism was one thing in the hands of the harmonious Dryden, and quite another thing in the pages of the brilliant and sententious Pope.

Perhaps the finest preface in the language is Pope's Preface to his Miscellanies, most of them written before the age of twenty-five. And, for our own parts, we regard the dedication of the Lover, by Steele, as the noblest dedication we ever read. As the volume is very scarce, we quote the entire epistle, as a masterpiece of its kind:

"*To Sir Samuel Garth, M. D.*

"SIR: As soon as I thought of making the Lover a present to one of my friends, I resolved, without further distracting my choice, to send it *To the Best-natured Man.* You are so universally known for this character, that an epistle so directed would find its way to you without your name, and I believe nobody but you yourself would deliver such a superscription to any other person.

"This propensity is the nearest akin to love; and good-nature is the worthiest affection of the mind, as love is the noblest passion of it; while the latter is wholly employed in

Hosted by Google

endeavoring to make happy one single object, the other diffuses its benevolence to all the world.

"As this is your natural bent, I cannot but congratulate you on the singular felicity, that your profession is so agreeable to your temper. For what condition is more desirable than a constant impulse to relieve the distressed, and a capacity to administer that relief? *When the sick man hangs his eye on that of his physician, how pleasing must it be to speak comfort to his anguish, to raise in him the first motions of hope, to lead him into a persuasion that he shall return to the company of his friends, the care of his family, and all the blessings of being.*

"The manner in which you practice this heavenly faculty of aiding human life, is according to the liberality of science, and demonstrates that your heart is more set upon doing good than growing rich.

"The painful artifices which empirics are guilty of, to draw cash out of valetudinarians, are the abhorrence of your generous mind, and *it is as common with Garth to supply indigent patients with money for food, as to receive it from wealthy ones for physic.* How much more amiable, Sir, would the generosity which is already applauded by all who know you, appear to those whose gratitude you every day refuse, if they knew that you resist their presents lest you should supply those whose wants you know, by taking from those with whose necessities you are unacquainted?

"The families you frequent receive you as their friend and well-wisher, whose concern, in their behalf, is as great as that of those who are related to them by the ties of blood, and the sanctions of affinity. This tenderness interrupts the satisfactions of conversations, to which you are so happily turned, but *we forgive you that our mirth is often insipid to you, while*

Hosted by Google

you sit absent to what passes amongst us, from your care of such as languish in sickness. We are sensible their distresses, instead of being removed by company, return more strongly to your imagination by comparison of their condition to the jollities of health.

"But I forget I am writing a dedication; and, in an address of this kind, it is more usual to celebrate men's great talents, than those virtues to which such talents should be subservient: yet, where the bent of a man's spirit is taken up in the application of his whole force to serve the world in his profession, it would be frivolous not to entertain him rather with thanks for what he is, than applause for what he is capable of being. Besides, Sir, there is no room for saying anything to you, as you are a man of wit, and a great poet; all that can be spoken in the celebration of such faculties has been incomparably said by yourself to others, or by others to you. You have never been excelled in this kind but by those who have written in praise of you: I will not pretend to be your rival, even with such an advantage over you, but assuring you, in Mr. Codrington's* words, that I do not know whether my admiration or love is greater.

"I remain, Sir, your most faithful friend, and most obliged humble servant,

"RICHARD STEELE."

If this be not writing from and to the heart, we know not what is. This was one of those rare occasions where both writer and patron have a generous spirit, and where praise can be given without servility, and received without loss of self respect.

* Thou hast no faults, or I no faults can spy;
Thou art all beauty, or all blindness I.
Codrington to Dr. Garth, before the Dispensary.

Hosted by Google

To return to the earliest writers of dedications in English (we have forsaken regularity of method in the present paper, but shall endeavor to regain it); Bacon's dedication of the Advancement, to the King, is a piece of keen satire and magnificent eulogium united, forming a composition of wonderful ingenuity and eloquence. Dryden's dedications are equally splendid and fulsome. We cannot help admiring his rich musical style, and copious matter (a Field of Cloth of Gold), but at the same time we lose all confidence in the sincerity of a man who could address the most insipid peer of the realm in the same glowing colours with which he would depict the features of the prince of poets. His critical prefaces are even finer yet, and may be justly styled æsthetical treatises. Mere prefaces in a confined sense Dryden did not write, but rather rich, copious, critical essays. On his own premises, and with his artificial education, Dryden reasoned vigorously, and illustrated his views with beauty, and even splendor of ornament. He has left on record the finest portraits of the Elizabethan dramatists, Shakspeare, Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher. But Dryden is not without defects. He is tediously minute in criticising his own dramatic pieces, and displays too much of erudition on points of comparatively trifling importance.

Steele's dedication to the Lover we have extracted. The dedications of the volumes of the Tattler are hardly less fine. They are much shorter, and less personal, but graceful and natural. In the dedication of the first volume, to Mr. Maynwaring, he thus admirably sets forth (what should have been placed in a preface, for it relates to the work itself, and not to its patron) the sum of his endeavors, and which might be assumed with the greatest propriety by every work of the kind: "The general purpose of this paper is to expose the false arts

Hosted by Google

of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse and our behavior." In the dedication to the second volume, to Mr. Edward Wortley Montague, he thus delicately compliments his benevolent generosity:—"I know not how to say a more affectionate thing to you, than to wish that you may be always what you are; and that you may ever think, as I know you now do, *that you have a much larger fortune than you want.*" The third volume opens with a perfect specimen of amenity and courteous eloquence. It is addressed to Lord Cowper, in Steele's proper person, and includes a brilliant portrait of the great statesman and forensic orator. The concluding volume of the series is presented to Lord Halifax, the Mecænas of the day, to whom every author of eminence offered the first fruits of his genius, and dedicated the choisest productions of his maturer taste. He was the nobleman, ambitious of literary fame, who was "Fed with soft dedications all day long," by Addison, Steele, Pope, Swift (who afterwards changed his tune upon being neglected by him), &c.

Addison's dedications have not so genial a tone as his fellow-laborer's; yet they are unquestionably impressed with the habitual elegance of his style. He was fortunate in his patrons, the first four volumes of the Spectator being addressed to Somers, Halifax, Boyle, and Marlborough.

Pope's preface, we remarked, was, perhaps, the finest in the language. It is curt, polished, full of sense, with a dash of caustic irony and refined sentiment, curiously blended, and written as with a pen of steel. The same antithetical manner, precision of thought, and brilliancy of expression, that mark the epigrammatic verse of the Wasp of Twit'nam prevail in

Hosted by Google

his prose; and in none of his prose do they appear in such a vivid light as in the preface to his Miscellaneous Works.

We can only refrain from transcribing passage after passage by the apprehension of exceeding our prescribed space, and by the reflection that, as the works of Pope are so universally accessible, quotation would only tend to encourage indolence in the reader, who can turn to it readily.

Mr. Chalmers speaks of Johnson's dedications as "models of courtly address; they might have been such in the reign of the dull Dutchman, George II., but now-a-days they read a little too much like the pompous flourishes of the ancient regime. Goldsmith's dedications are much briefer, but more to the point, and more graceful. In an introduction, despite of the triptology of his style, Johnson was at home. And his style was admirably suitable to occasions of moment and themes of weight and importance. From the sonorous music of his best writing, we can readily admit that Temple (as has been asserted) was one of the models of Johnson's prose. In point and vigor, Johnson was his superior, but he wants Temple's simplicity and ease. Johnson used to say, there were two things he knew he could do well—state what a work ought to contain, and then relate the reasons or deduce the causes why the writer had failed in executing what he proposed. The first of these talents he possessed to perfection, as we see by his prefaces, most of which were written to order, and are often vastly superior to the book they introduced to the reader. The preface to Rolt's Dictionary of Trade and Commerce is a striking instance. Johnson had never seen the book, but was asked to give a preface, which he wrote accordingly. He said he knew what such a book ought to contain, and marked out its expected contents. According to Chalmers, the production was almost worthless.

Hosted by Google

When a bookseller's drudge, the noble old moralist indited many an introduction to books of travel and science, school treatises, translations, catalogues. Only a few of these have been preserved in the correct editions of his works.

Johnson possessed great faculties of method and classification. He had clear and strong, though not fine and subtle powers of analysis and classification. Hence resulted this talent of telling what a book should contain. In a preface, it was not his business to go farther. But in his lives and extended criticisms he was equally happy in assigning the causes of ill success and of certain failure, on particular grounds. Goldsmith's prefaces were less vigorous, less pointed, but more graceful and simply beautiful.

After the dissolution of the Johnsonian school of writers, we read few classical prefaces save by pupils of the old classical school. Irving is the last of these. Scott expended considerable pains on his introductions, and proposed rewriting all of his prefaces to the Waverley novels, just before his death. Much of Sir Walter's pleasantest writing occurs in these rambling preludes to his animating narratives. Bulwer's prefaces are distorted by the narrowest egotism and unbounded assumption; yet they are such as a man of his talents would alone write. The poets have written the best prose and the best prefaces, too; such are (wide apart to be sure) Hunt's lively gossipping introductions, and Wordsworth's elevated lectures, for such they amount to, on the dignity and nobleness of his art.

We trust the day is coming when writers will return to the composition of prefaces, if only to preserve an historical interest in their works. Much of the interest of the old prefaces is derived from the names at the top and bottom of the page, with the date of publication. Prefaces thus afford

Hosted by Google

authentic materials for literary history, and if carefully executed, for literary criticism. They preserve, too, a regard for the good and well-tested standard forms of writing, and in themselves require a species of talent that should not be neglected. To declare his principal aims, and explain his chief intentions, thereby giving the reader a proper clue to the argument of the whole work, with a candid and open avowal of deficiencies, is the proper business of a preface, and of a writer of books. To address his friend, or at least the reader, with cordiality or respect, in accordance with the spirit of the production; to bespeak his favorable notice, or seek to avoid unmerited neglect, is the province of the dedication. To accomplish these ends, a recurrence to standard models cannot be hurtful, since there is something of a formal, and, as it were, of artistical etiquette in the matter, and which is not to be lost sight of. The author, who is also a gentleman, and it is the effect of letters to make him such, will certainly endeavor to carry himself with as genteel an air on paper as in company. In every place, he will observe the universal laws of polite regard and the local observances of conventional decorum. One of these is to write a preface to every book he publishes, which should also be accompanied by a dedication. In the first, he addresses the public; and in the last he acknowledges the claims of private affection or personal gratitude, of admiration for talents or virtue in one of the stars of contemporary renown, or of worth and excellence in obscure genius and unobtrusive merit. The preface pleads, apologizes, defends or attacks: the dedication conciliates and compliments. Let an author be friendless and humble, he still can appeal to the "gentle" reader for sympathy and confidence.

Hosted by Google

XXIX.

RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHY.

We believe Dr. Johnson was the first critic to complain of the "*penury*" of English biography. It was a complaint that savored more of hastiness and ignorance than the Doctor's contemporary admirers would have been willing to allow any reviewer to discover in him, but still it was such; and now that every pretender to criticism makes it a point to beard the rough but manly old dogmatist, we may allow ourselves the privilege of picking an additional flaw in his critical reputation (almost worn out by repeated attacks). It is certain, for his undoubted vigor and ability, no writer of eminence ever made so many and such gross critical blunders as Doctor Johnson. On real life and domestic morals; the character and manners of the Londoners; the hypocrisies of men of the world; the thin-skinned sentimentalities of pretenders to sentiment and criticism, he exhibited an acuteness of observation, a comprehensiveness of judgment, and pungency of satire, that have never been surpassed. But in the field of literary criticism, requiring finer tact and a nicer perception, the grossness of his senses, no less than the obtuseness of his taste, rendered him unfit, physically and intellectually, to judge of poets and men of fancy.

In the rich territory of old English literature, there is not perhaps, a more fruitful province than that of biography, not only in the classic form of lives, but also memoirs, diaries and autobiography. It is true the lives most generally read at present, were written either during the lifetime or since the death of Johnson; as in the former period the classic lives of Goldsmith and Johnson, and the memoirs of Cumberland,

Hosted by Google

and from that period to the present day, among heaps of wretched compilations, we must distinguish the first book of the kind in the world, Boswell's Johnson, the learned autobiography of Gibbon, the simple yet fascinating lives of Hume and Franklin, honest self-painters; the classic compendiums of Southey, the lives of Burns by Currie and Lockhart, and the minor sketches of Irving. The latest permanent work of this class is the Memoirs of Leigh Hunt. And yet by far the richest treasures of English biography are to be found among the antiquarian volumes of the old English library. The best of these form a choice list; classic to this day. There are the lives, by Burnet, of Hale and Rochester; the austere, incorruptible judge and pure citizen, and the lively, volatile wit and libertine subsiding into a sober, earnest Christian. Walton's lives are too well known to dilate upon the heroes of them at present; yet what a noble company of poets, divines and Christian gentlemen form the subjects of his volumes—Hooker, and Wotton, and Donne, and Herbert, and Sanderson! Zouch's life of Walton himself is fit to be included as the humble companion of these. Then we have North's life of Lord Guildford, full of lively personal strokes and characters of the great lawyers of the time of Charles II. and James II. Fenton's lives of Milton and Waller—Fell's Hammond, the Fenelon of the royalist divines, and favorite chaplain of Charles I., sharing his imprisonment and dangers. Among the latest of the older lives, Doddridge's Life of Colonel Gardiner, of which we shall say more before we conclude.

The French have the reputation of being the best memoir writers in the world; yet their most courtly wits have not surpassed Hamilton in his pictures of the royal licentiousness of the age of Charles II., and Pepys and Evelyn. The me-

Hosted by Google

moirs of Colonel Hutchinson by his wife, and of Venetia Digby, the beauty of her day, and the popular toast, despite her doubtful reputation, by the quaint fantast Sir Kenelm Digby, are at least a fair match for Bassompiere and Rochefoucauld. And then, as repositories of facts and personal circumstances nowhere else to be learned, we have the elaborate histories of Wood and Fuller, Spence's and Aubrey's anecdotes, and the letter writers, from old Howell himself to Pope and his friends. If such a list looks like "penury," we should like to learn the comparative scale by which "wealth" is to be adjudged.

A fair proportion of the old lives are those of good Christians without pretence, and fine scholars without presumption. Most of them, too, have an additional value as models for conduct: Rochester and Gardiner being the sole instances of "men that need repentance," and they both converted in the heyday of the vicious career in which they were embarked.

So much by way of preface—a long introduction to a brief article. We have selected this topic to point out the prevalent defects, in almost every work of the kind; defects, too, springing from the best of motives, and more easily discovered than corrected. In the best of the old lives we find this ever-recurring defect: a desire to paint in the hero of biography, a perfect man; a tendency to exaggerate individual and particular merits, by the force of contrast with inferior traits in much inferior characters. The writers of lives, in all times, have been too sparing of the shade in their portraits. A profusion of light falling upon the admirable virtues, allows no room for the exhibition of defects. Every trait is heightened; every characteristic marked with an em-

Hosted by Google

phasis seldom found in nature. The subjects of biography, like the heroes of novels, are too often

"Faultless monsters whom the world ne'er saw."

This disgusts the thoughtful reader, whether young or old; for the youthful student soon finds these pictures disproved in real life, and the sage knows their unreality while he is perusing the page. In the older lives, in all of those to which we have referred, a saving clause may be inserted, that the subjects of the writers were all of them men of that eminence that either extravagant praise or excessive censure soon corrected itself. For one would report differently of their lives and actions from another, and hence a balance might easily be struck between them. And besides, in extenuation, we may offer the best apology for the biographer, that his hero was often a character so fascinating, viewed as a whole, that it was very excusable to overlook minor errors and petty defects. All of Walton's characters, for instance, inevitably seduce a writer into encomium, when we should be writing impartially; and it is pleasanter, as well as easier, to pen an eulogy rather than a life. This was the fault that Johnson accuses Sprat of falling into,* and a fault more glaring in Mrs. Hutchinson's book than in most of the old lives, and less justifiable, since she wrote the history of her time, as well as the life of her husband.

Doddridge's Life of Colonel Gardiner is a singular specimen of this class of books, of an inferior literary value, compard with the rest, but still excellent. As an example of its class, we will give the reader a summary digest of its contents. The author, a nonconformist divine of considerable reputation, became in the career of his ministry professionally

* Life of Cowley.

Hosted by Google

acquainted and intimately connected with the subject of his narrative, who was a royalist officer, a colonel of dragoons. Gardiner revealed to him from time to time the most eventful passages of his life, over which hung, in his devout imagination, a mystical halo, radiant with celestial beauty. He was born at a remarkable period, 1688, the year of the English Revolution, and expired, at a no less stirring time, on the battle field at Preston Pans, when the partisans of the house of Stuart "were out" for the second time, in '45.

This distinguished officer and Christian was the son of an officer of good family, who fought the battles of his country on the continent, during the reign of William III., and of Anne, after him, and in which Marlborough was the presiding military genius of Great Britain. A military school, with Marlborough and Eugene at its head, could not fail of turning out able commanders; and of these Gardiner was one of the chief. Brave, to a daring rashness, he had all the splendid qualities, and but too many of the striking vices, of the soldier. Like the majority of celebrated men, who have evinced in later life the influence of early education, Gardiner was fortunate in having a most estimable mother, to whose guidance and example he was wont to attribute the uncorrupted parts of his character and temper. Yet ill company, and that of a military cast, was allowed at one period to master the original good qualities of his nature, and taint the purity of his soul with the tarnish of vice. He early fell into gross living, swore dreadfully, cherished a malignant spirit of revenge—(before the age of twenty-one he had fought *three* duels)—and exhibited even a ferocity, that became sobered down into manly valor and Christian resolution; so much so, that in middle life he used to say, "I fear sinning more than fighting!" In every engagement he gained ap-

Hosted by Google

plause for skill, no less than courage, since he scientifically practised his profession.

Though often remonstrated with, and even sometimes alarming by his horrid imprecations the better portion of his comrades, he still went on in his evil ways, until the occurrence of what he speaks of as a vision from heaven, and would have regarded as a miracle. To fill up the interval, it seems, one morning, previous to the hour appointed for meeting certain of his associates at a dinner party, he took up one of the religious works with a quaint title, published at the era of the Protectorate, when the Puritans were in fashion and in power. He read to ridicule, but was suddenly overpowered by a conviction, awfully indescribable, of his wickedness, which threw him into a sort of vision or trance, during which he imagined, as we construe the declaration, that he saw a living representation of his crucified Master, and heard the divine voice, in tones of entreaty and to this purport, "Have I not suffered this for thee?" The dream, the fancied vision, or what you will call it, struck him with profound dismay, and awakened his soul to the consideration of its state.

From this period he was another man: strictly pious, regular in every habit, loving solitude and religious conversation and prayer. He became a disciplinarian of the noblest sort, the moral teacher as well as commander of his men. He now was used to recount the wonderful providences (so he termed them) of his life, of his extraordinary escapes, of being wounded in the mouth just after uttering a horrid oath, a punishment closely consequent on his offence: of striking personal deliverance from imminent dangers. A good man and true Christian hero, after Steele's model, a saint militant, he yet was not without a besetting defect—and that was the excitability of his religious imagination. He dreamed a

Hosted by Google

dream of following across the part of a field his Lord and Saviour: he made a prediction of the death of the king, which turned out correct. Everything with him was miraculous, and a little heightened by (unconscious) extravagance. No doubt he was sincere: the only question is, if he was not a self-deceiver. A sudden conversion, an opportune deliverance, is sufficient to turn the head of the wisest man. We think that, like Donne's extraordinary vision of his wife and dear child, his vision was the waking dream of an imaginative mind.

Whether imagination or reality presided on these occasions, still he remained consistent and firm: unlike Volney and those cowardly blasphemers, who take back in a moment of security what they uttered in the hour of danger. Ever these circumstances remained before him, a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, to guide his faltering steps. A lofty confidence elevated the hopes and daily walk of the happy man, who considered himself blessed in beholding the countenance of his Saviour and friend.

With the mass, the love for the miraculous, for prophecy, for mysteries, is more a false state, a mere religious stimulant, and not the healthy action of a vigorous soul. But it was not so with him.

Gardiner died the death of a soldier and a Christian, on the field of battle, and in the arms of victory, an officer of the generous strain of Gustavus Adolphus; and like that lion of the North, high-toned, exact, judicious, and sincere, he fought the good fight of faith, and left behind him a sweet remembrance in the hearts of all, as a brave and accomplished officer, a steadfast Christian, a good man, and a courteous gentleman—*Requiescat in pace.*

To return to the general subject: for modern religious

Hosted by Google

biography, we entertain no great favor. The writers of it are in most cases ill-fitted for their task, and indeed quite unpractised in composition. Southey's Wesley (a philosophical history of Methodism) and Heber's life of Taylor are the only two classic works in this department, of the nineteenth century, we can, at present, recall. The lives of most missionaries are more interesting for the satistical information they contain than for aught else. Missionaries should be good travel writers, yet we find only a single Borrow among them. The subjects of religious biography are in most cases good enough people, but quite unworthy of being embalmed for the admiration of posterity. The embalming is thrown away, for they never reach posterity. An eminently great and good man, an exemplar of faith and charity, should never be allowed to pass out of the memories of men, cannot be forgotten; he will live in tradition, if not in printed books. But many good, humble Christians die daily, whom it is by no means essential to write the lives of; whom it rather hurts the interests of religion, and certainly of literature (considered purely as such) to make unduly prominent. The facts of their lives are few; they have done little to affect the rest of mankind; their greatest victories (silent and obscure) have been over themselves (the noblest of victories), and their profoundest discoveries have been of the wickedness of their own hearts. These facts, to the individual of all others the most important, still have little interest for the world at large. The story of the Christian's life is told in two words, Repentance and Love. Now, unless striking instances occur, or curious details are presented, a religious life, of all others, presents very little to interest even the most sympathizing intelligent) reader.

The injury done to literature by a flood of religious lives is

Hosted by Google

clear: standard works of the highest character are neglected for a new biography of the least value; corruptions of style become frequent, and essentially impair the idiomatic graces of our tongue. Inferior models of excellence are held up, to the exclusion of the most excellent; cant is prevalent; at first unconscious, it becomes at last confirmed and hypocritical.

Let no serious reader think we underrate the humblest virtues of the patient Christian. We reverence piety in the garb of the beggar; we believe it to add a crowning glory to the wisest head. Yet we protest against an indiscriminate record of the private lives of Christians, who have not some other claim on the universal attention of mankind. Want of literature is not, however, the only want of many, both of the subjects and authors, of religious lives; many have wanted real humility, many have in a secret self-praise elevated themselves above the rest of mankind, and thought a publication of their conversion and religious experience, necessary for the salvation of the world. With such we can pretend to have no patience, since we believe that they are self-deluded after all, and rather to be pitied than admirred.

The sincere Christian need not fear oblivion. Unknown to men, he is not forgotten by his heavenly Father; and if his life is not told in the perishable books of human authors, his name is nevertheless registered in the Book of Life.

Hosted by Google

XXX.

TITLES.

We Americans have been ridiculed for our extravagant admiration of titles, with more of justice than most of us are at all willing to allow. Notwithstanding our republican spirit, in government and political rights, we still, as a nation, entertain a vast respect for forms, ceremonies, honors, grave respects.

The most laughable part of the matter, too, is found in the fact, that a people characteristically pacific, both from inclination and policy, should affect such a violent attachment for military titles, with all the pomp and insignia of war. Every petty mechanic may become, and often is, a captain or major. Your host at the tavern is colonel: the blacksmith of the village, perhaps a general—*sometimes* a Greene. The persons holding these offices are frequently among the mildest of men, probably so timid as to run, in actual conflict, at the report of artillery. Our city and country militia would hardly stand before a disciplined army—save and excepting always, in a defensive national war, and then cowards would be converted into heroes. We do not speak of such an emergency, but refer to the soldierly character of our people. A mere soldier of fortune fights equally well, or ill, everywhere, under every government; but Americans are soldiers from necessity, and at home. There they would act like brave men, as they always have done.

English writers have noticed this mock heroic trait in our people; but they have not remarked that the admiration for titles is as common in the line of civil as of military life. We are equally open to satire on that side, also. A judge of a

Hosted by Google

county court is with us a great man; and, indeed, a judgeship is generally the mark of a country gentleman's ambition. One of our Presidents, after filling the highest office, became the justice of one of the Virginia county courts.

The thirst for office and titular distinctions is not, however, confined to the country. At a charter election, what a rivalry for the petty offices of the wards. Irving, in his satire on the Dutch burgomaster and schepens, has painted with exact fidelity, our contemporary aldermen and their assistants. These are the smallest in general of our little great men. What a turkey-cock is a true alderman of this class! not the official performing his regular duties, and carefully watching the interests and comfort of his ward, but the mere beef-eater, the pursy, swelling, pompous ignoramus. Elected by those who have some design upon his pockets, or at least his patronage; consorting with his kind, and thinking with them, he has nothing to do but to eat *rich* dinners (at the almshouse for *sick* and *poor*) and talk in an imperative style, the autocrat of the side walks, of the church where he attends, for a comfortable nap of a summer's afternoon, of the tradesmen he deigns to employ, and of the barber's shop, where he is first shaved in the morning, and reads all the papers through, keeping a shop full waiting, while he toils through the advertisements. The terror of beggars and of petty criminals, hard-hearted, a usurer, a rigorous landlord, without any bowels of mercy.

To leave such reflections as these, which are somewhat out of place here in a gossiping essay, a strong objection to the employment of titles is the very inadequate character they bear. The Right Honorable gentleman may be, and often ought to be, called a most dishonorable traitor. The Reverend brother is not always deserving of reverence, nor the

Hosted by Google

learned advocate always a model of legal attainments. These titles and epithets are, for the most part, unmeaning, and often savor of downright irony. By a title is often implied much more than is actually meant; and like the bishop's lawn, the marshal's truncheon, and the judge's ermine, are considered the correlatives of piety, courage, and incoruptible integrity. Yet they afford, in general, merely the substitutes for those qualities. Titles are worshipped by "the great vulgar and the small," who are in the habit of taking the name for the thing. To carry any weight with it, a title should infer some particular merit, as the valor of a hero, or the wisdom of a counsellor. It should have the effect of a judicious epithet: sometimes a sublime description, as in the list of titles of the Saviour of mankind. It should serve as a designation. But what mean the titles of courts? The "Grace," for instance, of a duke, or an archbishop; or the "Serenity" of a petty German prince. They can be borne by good and bad men, indiscriminately. The true title must be earned; the reward of merit is worthless, conferred as an act of favor. Artificial rank can be created. Nature only can form the true nobleman. Kings, we are told, can make or unmake, princes or lords, who may flourish or may fade;

> "But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
> When once destroyed, can never be supplied."

Or, as Burns nobly sings:—

> "A prince can mak' a belted knight,
> A marquis, duke, and a' that;
> But an honest man 's aboon his might,
> Gude faith, he maunna fa' that."

Hosted by Google

The noblest of titles, gentleman, not the artificial designation, but the highest perfection of the manly character, cannot be created by letters patent. He must be born one, with a clear head, a warm heart, a noble will, and a gentle soul, invincible by fortune or circumstance. Thus averse, among his other *genuine* traits of manhood, is the true gentleman to all titular distinctions; whose character Dekkar has finely drawn in a passage descriptive of the perfect character of the Divine word.

"The first of men that e'er wore earth about him was a sufferer,
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit,
The first true gentleman that ever lived."

The gentleman and the Christian knight are here one, as they always should be, united in the same character. Yet how unlike the ordinary notion of a spirited, showy gallant, or overbearing aristocrat. *Man*, simply, is a sufficiently lofty title: a true man is the first of created beings. One of Shakspeare's characters nobly says:—

"I tell thee, sirrah, I write *man*, to which title no age can bring thee." Neither, we may add, can any amount of wealth, degree of power, extent of ability, or elevation of office, if the heart and soul be wanting.

The admiration of titles is something childish, and pertaining to a state of barbarism. The names and singular appellations borne by our native Indians, as well as by the savage tribes of other countries, illustrate this position, and are more worthy of attention, from their real meaning, than the family crests of civilized nations, at the present day, with all the trumpery of the Heralds' College.

The facility of obtaining certain titles, from literary institutions, and the ordinary academic degrees, has taken off the

Hosted by Google

edge of novelty, and rendered them very commonplace dignities. You find as many doctors of divinity as of medicine, and masters of arts abound almost as much as simple bachelors. In most instances, the titles are sadly misapplied. The teachers are learners, and the masters mere tyros. Almost as great a farce as college degrees—we speak it *sub rosâ*—are the degrees of masonry, the sublime degree of this, and the incomprehensible degree of that. Now-a-days, they do read absurdly, to be sure, in a Masonic Register, the names of honest, plain mechanics, as High-Priests, Grand Kings, Scribes and Sojourners—Sir John Johnson of such an encampment, Right Worshipful of such a chapter, &c. One respectable sexton we find a High Priest, and the same office sustained by a noted political ballad singer. Speculative masonry, a benevolent and prudential system, in its origin, fitly and impressively exhibited by figures and symbols, affords, abstractedly and in practice, a wise and striking commentary on the Christian morality. But the multitude of signs, and the grave burlesque of (the reported) ceremonies, no less than the number, names and functions of several of the officers, have a tendency to degrade into ridicule what was most praiseworthy in its first intention.

The violent contrast between the ordinary civil occupations, and the elevated titles of the Masonic Dignitaries, is the cause of the comic effect produced on hearing them recited. It is like making Sancho Governor of Barataria, or dubbing poor Saltonstall Duke of Rigmarole. We are apt to look upon many titles as mere nicknames, intended by way of satirical jest upon pretension and affectation: often a serious joke, imperceptible to the party most concerned in extinguishing it. To modern sceptics, the high-flown style of addressing certain of the scholastic doctors was of this nature; they were uniformly irrefragable, sublime, invincible, celestial.

Hosted by Google

From a couple of papers in D'Israeli's collection of curiosities, we glean a few facts relative to the origin of certain Royal titles. "Illustrious" was never given save to those who merited the epithet, until the time of Constantine. The salutation "Your Grace" was the first form of salutation. "Your Highness" came next into vogue. Henry VIII. is said to have been the first monarch who assumed it. The title "Majesty" was accorded (for the first time) by Francis I., to the same sovereign, in their celebrated interview on the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Selden thought a king of England should be styled Emperor.

Our own countrymen are not the only people who are apt to be captivated by "the glory of a name." We have no orders of nobility [the Governor and Lieut.-Governor of Massachusetts are the only public functionaries, in this country, provided *by law*, with titles of Honor], and ought to be free from any charge of man-worship: hero-worship is another thing, and always existing, should be perpetually cherished in every community. The Spaniards formerly, and the Germans of the present day, are the nations most notorious for titled orders. We knew a German barber, of this city, who held his credentials and patent of Baron. French Count is almost a synonyme for unprincipled adventurer. The English entertain a deep and instinctive respect for their nobility. The Spanish Don is the proudest gentleman in Europe.

These Spaniards, at one period during the glorious epoch of their history, from the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella to the conclusion of that of Philip III., accumulated titles and modes of address, with points of etiquette and precedence, to such an extent as to make it necessary to publish, in a volume, the *indispensable* forms. The king of Spain, at that time, claimed as many titles as the Grand Seignor, whose address

Hosted by Google

fills several pages. The natural stateliness of the Castilian would allow of no remission of dignity. He had, then, rather be robbed by a courteous footpad, who approached him with "all the honors" of the road, than be substantially aided by a rude despiser of ceremonies. Conversations must have been then less an interchange of sentiment or repartee than an elaborate contest of external civilities. Incidentally, the chivalric soldier or bold navigator caught this passion for pomp and magnificence, from oriental discovery and conquest or colonization; but an original basis was to be found in the national character, which was attracted by the noble, the splendid, and the grand; and which contained the elements of all these.

At this present epoch, the Germans appear to be the most smitten with a love of titles. It is, indeed, a passion. The great nation, which has produced the greatest literary artists of this century, the profoundest inquirers, the most learned scholars, still cherishes the baubles of office, and is pleased with the decoration of a ribbon or a medal. The most knowing have their foibles: there are "follies of the wise." The various classes of German titles are endless, and are not less remarkable than their singularity and application. There are titles of rank and of office—Rath, or Counsellor, is the commonest of these; and of this there are several grades. Of schoolmasters there are many ranks—Rector, Sub-rector, Primus, Secundus, Tertius, Quartus, Quintus, &c., &c., &c. The Professor is ordinarius and extra-ordinarius. Most of them are extraordinary enough, in all conscience. They profess every imaginable department of learning, even to Carlyle's and Jean Paul's Professors of Things in General. These Germans, too, even confer on the wife the husband's title, as Mrs. Court Counsellor, and the like. Goethe's mother, we learn, from Bettine, was always styled Frau-Rath.

Hosted by Google

Even one bearing no distinct title is always styled as Mr. in every instance—not as we employ the term, but Mr. Carpenter, Blacksmith, or Grocer, as the case may be. The Chinese are, perhaps, beyond all nations in their passion for honors, but we have not been able to gain any particular details, from the general descriptions. The number of mandarins is said to be immense, and their authority with the people almost unbounded.

To turn to the philosophy of our subject, and leave curious facts. Modern titles, or rather modern aristocracy, a relic of feudalism, arose out of a military aristocracy. Originally, they were the natural offspring of despotism and conquest. They were intended to dazzle only to enslave, or to quote the gist of the whole matter, as it is admirably summed up in the Rights of Man (Vol. II., p. 86). The writer has been dilating upon the law of primogeniture, and thus proceeds to describe the character of the aristocracy growing out of it. The passage is remarkable for condensed thought and terse expression. "The nature and character of aristocracy shows itself to us in this law. It is a law against every law of nature, and nature herself calls for its destruction. Establish family justice and aristocracy falls. By the aristocratical law of primogeniture, in a family of six, five are exposed. *Aristocracy never has but one child.* The rest are begotten to be devoured. They are thrown to the cannibal for prey, and the natural parent prepares the unnatural repast. As everything which is out of nature in man affects, more or less, the interests of society so does this. All the children which the aristocracy disowns [which are all except the oldest], are, in general, cast like orphans on a parish, to be provided for by the public, but at a greater charge. Unnecessary offices and places in governments and courts are created at the expense of the public to

Hosted by Google

maintain them. With what kind of parental reflections can the father or mother contemplate their younger offspring? By nature they are children, and by marriage they are heirs; but by aristocracy they are bastards and orphans. They are the flesh and blood of their parents in one line, and akin to them in the other. To restore, therefore, parents to their children, and children to their parents, relations to each other, and man to society, and to exterminate the monster aristocracy, root and branch, the French constitution has destroyed the line of primogeniture. Here, then, lies the monster, and Mr. Burke, if he pleases, may write its epitaph."

Yet arbitrary and intolerant as Aristocracy is too apt to be and has generally been found—too often an overbearing despotism, still we, sometimes, in our visions of the future, imagine a possible Aristocracy, composed purely of the wisest and most virtuous, those intended by Nature and Nature's God to direct their fellows and animate their generous aspirations into manly action. This is, however, a state to be hoped for rather than expected with confidence. The Aristocracy of the present is too much the creature of circumstance to deserve our regard. It is not a self-dependent, bold and intelligent rule. It looks here at wealth, and inquires not if a man is worthy, but *how much he is worth.* The best men are they who are *good* for the greatest amount. Their maxim is, "*wealth* makes the MAN—the *want of it*, the FELLOW." If the aristocracy of birth be considered, it looks not to the excellent qualities of a man's own parents or immediate family (as an ordinary thing), it rather investigates the antiquity of his house (the character of his immediate predecessors does not avail so much), and the *long line* of descent from a famous original. Its glory is retrospective and traditional; and noble as that may be as an incentive to in-

Hosted by Google

dividual performance, it can, notwithstanding, never claim the force of a substitute for them. True democracy may, however, consist, and ought to be accompanied by true gentlemanliness. That they thus always do not agree is no argument against the possible union. Democracy is a principle (political, not social), and does not depend upon the dress or pursuits or accomplishments of the individual professing it. It is a philanthropic and philosophic system of polity, wholly irrespective of personal habits or prejudices. It is the government of the people by themselves. Of this great body, the leaders (for the mass cannot act as one man, and must delegate duties and assign powers) are expected to be in advance, socially and intellectually, if not also morally and politically of their fellows, else why leaders? And we find as matter of history, the staunchest advocates of liberal views and free government at all times, and especially in the most excited times, to have been able men, good patriots and gentlemen—to look at Lafayette in France; Sidney and Russell and Hampden in England; and all of our own great Revolutionary characters without exception. Not to dilate upon obvious truths, we shall conclude this sketch with an extract from the Rights of Man on the abolition of titles in France, at the framing of their new constitution—a masterly passage, equal to certain of Burke's noblest efforts, and which contains the spirit of the whole matter. "Titles are but a nickname, and every nickname is a title. The thing is perfectly harmless in itself, but it marks a certain foppery in the human character that degrades it. It renders man diminutive in things which are little. It talks about its fine riband like a girl, and shows its garters like a child. A certain writer of some antiquity, says, 'when I was a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.'

Hosted by Google

"It is properly from the elevated mind of France that the folly of titles has been abolished. It has outgrown the baby clothes of Count and Duke, and breeched itself into manhood. France has not levelled, it has exalted. It has put down the dwarf to set up the man. The insignificance of a senseless and noble Duke, Count or Earl has ceased to please. Even those who possessed them have disowned the gibberish, and as they outgrow the rickets have despised the rattle. The genuine mind of man thirsting for its native home, society, contemns the gew-gaws that separate him from it. *Titles are like circles drawn by the magician's wand, to contract the sphere of man's felicity. He lives immortal within the Bastile of a name, and surveys at a distance the envied life of man.*

"Is it then any wonder that titles should fall in France? Is it not a great wonder that they should be kept up anywhere? What are they? What is their worth, nay, what is their amount? When we think or speak of a judge or general, we associate with it the ideas of office and character; we think of purity in the one and bravery in the other; but when we use a word merely as a title, no ideas associate with it. Through all the vocabulary of names, there is not such an animal as a Duke or a Count; neither can we connect any certain idea of the word. Whether they mean strength or weakness, wisdom or folly, a child or a man, or a rider or a horse, is all equivocal. What respect, then, can be paid to that which describes nothing and means nothing? Imagination has given figure and character to centaurs, satyrs, and down to all the fairy tribe; but titles baffle even the powers of fancy, and are a chimerical nondescript."

Acute sense, enlivened by antithesis, and condensed into the form of pointed maxims, cannot in pungency and effect

Hosted by Google

transcend this spirited tirade. Indeed, there are not many passages, even in Burke's celebrated Reflections, which called forth this reply, that surpass the above episode, in compressed power and epigrammatic point. We have looked in vain into the journals of the first Congress and the secret debates, lately printed, for a discussion on the proper title by which to address the President of the United States—whether His Excellency, or by what other designation.* We looked into this matter at the suggestion of one far better fitted than ourselves, from his political studies, to resolve this problem. Yet it may be allowed to the generous advocate of the poor criminal, the humane legislator, to be slightly acquainted with what, at present, is no more than a piece of antiquarian curiosity. Human life and human improvement is of more consequence than titles of honor, and the abolition of capital punishment than a matter of form or of courtly address.

It is to be hoped that beyond the necessary terms of official appellation, titles will never be employed in this country, purely as stereotyped honorary epithets or unmeaning honors. We want men, not a nobility. We would honor greatness and goodness, virtue and talent untitled, far rather than title without either of these claims to attention and respect. We require the thing, and not the name. If we must have superfluous titles, let them be badges of dishonor, and to be avoided by every good man, good citizen, and true American.

* Note.—Since writing the above, we have been kindly referred to the proper volume. In the Journals of the Senate for the year '89, the question is discussed, of which only a brief minute remains. The debate lasted a week or more, during which the titles of Excellency and of His Highness, the Protector of our Liberties, were proposed, but objected to. The latter title was too much Cromwellian and monarchical

Hosted by Google

perhaps, for even the so-called black-cockade federalist. And, finally, the simple and appropriate address was resolved on of, the President of the United States.

XXXI.

ESSAYES AND CHARACTERES OF A PRISON AND PRISONERS:

BY GEFFRAY MINSHULL, OF GRAYES-INN, GENT.

THE object of this rare treatise, which is rather a collection of several short characters and fragmentary disquisitions, is to paint Life in Prison, and from the internal evidence it affords, no less than the later accounts of Howard, Buxton and Mrs. Fry, we dare affirm it to be a very faithful picture. Though modern philanthropy has effected much for the improvement of prison discipline, and the ameliorated condition of prisoners, yet still, in certain prominent particulars, a description of a prison more than two centuries ago, must answer to a description of the same place, at the present day. Dark, gloomy walls, barred windows, guards, jailors, locks, confinement, silence, are the outward marks of the prison, now as then. To be sure, the buildings are better, may be more elegantly constructed, are much cleaner, less turbulent; still a sense of solitude, a feeling of closeness, reigns within its precincts. The mere personal condition of prisoners is, in many respects, far preferable to what it was once. Yet, in these respects even, what great improvements still remain to be discovered and applied. But in more important points the system is little bettered. The prison chaplain, though (we trust) a different personage from the Newgate ordinary

Hosted by Google

in Fielding's time, is still ill paid, and altogether on a wrong footing. Intellectual light is virtually excluded from prisons, where even freedom of thought might be considered an infringement on the rules and restraints of the place.

In despite of all the works of benevolence, and especially of those deeds that tend to prevent the commission of crime, it is to be feared prisons must ever be filled. There is permanent evil in the world, and certain punishment, ever. Misfortune, poverty, vice, blind impulse, it is probable will always exist. Earth may never again see an Eden (the abode of innocence), till purged from grosser impurities by the last penal fires. Out of a world-conflagration only may universal peace and purity arise. Hence, we must conclude, the coexistence of crime and prisons for ages hereafter.

The prison described in this little volume, was a debtors' prison, the King's Bench. In our State, imprisonment for debt is now done away; a measure fraught with vast benefit, but, perhaps, accompanied by certain inevitable disadvantages. It is wonderful what enormities were suffered to be executed, until within a very few years, on this class of men, of whom, certainly, a considerable portion were innocent men, brought to that condition by the vices, or imprudence, or frauds of those, who stood in the relation of debtors to them. To this suffering, but respectable class of men, the author of this treatise (the fruit of personal observation and experience) does not appear to belong. From what we can gather, he was brought by his imprudence and folly to become an inhabitant of a prison.* He was a gentleman of

* A strong proof of family pride, rather misplaced, is evinced in the fact of the writer having his crest engraved on the title page. The *experience* the book displays is hardly of that nature a gentleman might be proud to display, even if enamored of his own cleverness as an author.

Hosted by Google

good family and liberal education, who was heartily disgusted by the place, its customs and company; and who earnestly advises all not to borrow, and run the chance of coming to the same place. He writes with the vigor of a strong character, and with no little elevation of sentiment; he is judicious and virtuous, with considerable erudition and quaint fancy, bottomed on good sense and manly feeling.

The composition of these essays and characters afforded the only occupation their author was willing to assume; and was at once his pleasant task and daily solace. The work is of some antiquity; it was first published in 1618, and reprinted twenty years after. The edition before us is of 1821, a reprint by the famous Edinburgh publishing house of Ballantyne & Co. It is one of a small edition of 150 copies, and perhaps there is not a duplicate of the work in this country. We think it very probable that Sir Walter himself, or one of his antiquarian cronies, selected this remarkable tract for republication, and with the selfish admiration of a virtuoso, limited the impression to enhance its rarity.

We spoke of this volume as presenting a picture of life in prison: it presents, also, its concomitants. The first character is of prisons in general; then of different sorts of prisoners; afterwards, in turn, of the company: of visitors: of the fare and entertainment: of the keepers, the jailors, the lockers up; and concludes with a relation of some curious local customs and personal observations.

The intention of the writer is expressed in a sort of proem to the characters. "My purpose is, with cleare water-colours to line me out a heart, yea such a heart, so discontented and oppressed, that I need not be curious in fitting every colour to his place, or to chuse the pleasantest chamber to draw it in, because in it I am to lay downe the bounds of those tem-

Hosted by Google

pestuous seas in which ten thousands are every day tossed, if not overwhelmed, which is so usual here amongst us, that every one is art's master in this workmanship; and every minute something or other is still added to this distressed picture, whose ponderous weight is so great that the frame is scarce able to bear the effigies." The character of a prison we subjoin entire. "A prison is a grave to bury men alive, and a place wherein a man, for half a year's experience, may learn more law, than he can at Westminster for a hundred pounds. It is a microcosmo, a little world of woe, it is a map of misery, it is a place that will learn a young man more villany, if he be apt to take it, in one half yeare, than he can learn at twenty dicing-houses, bowling allies, brothel houses, or ordinaries; and an old man, more policie than if he had been pupil to Machiavel. It is a place that hath more diseases predominant in it than the pest-house in the plague time, and it stinkes more than the lord mayor's dog house or Paris garden in August.

"It is a little commonwealth, although little wealth be common there; it is a desart where desert lyes hoodwinked: it is a famous citie, wherein are all trades, for here lies the alchymist can make *ex auro non aurum*, then *ex non auro, aurum*.

"It is as intricate a place as *Rosamond's Labyrinth*, and it is so full of blinde meanders and crooked turnings, that it is impossible to find the way out, except he be directed by a silver clue, and can never overcome the minotaure without a golden ball to work his owne safety.

"It is as Innes of Courts; for herein lawyers inhabit, that have crotchets to free other men, yet all their quirks and quiddities cannot enfranchise themselves.

"It is the Doctors' Commons, where skilful physitians fre-

Hosted by Google

quent; who, like Æsculapius, can cure men's diseases, yet cannot quintessence out of all their vegetals and minerals, a balsamum or elixir to make a sovereign plaster to heal the surfeit the mace has given them.

"It is the Chyrurgions' Hall, where many rare artists live, that can search other men's wounds, yet cannot treate the wound the serjeant hath give them.

"It is your Bankrupt's banquetting-house, where he sits feasting with the sweetmeats borrowed from other men's tables, having a voluntary disposition never to repay them again.

"It is your Prodigal's *ultimum refugium*, wherein he may see himself as in a glass, what his excess hath brought him to; and lest he should surfeit, comes hither to physicke himself with moderate diet, and least that his bed of downe should breed too many diseases, comes hither to change his bed, where he is scarce able to lye down.

"It is a purgatory which doth afflict a man with more miseries than ever he reaped pleasures. It is a pilgrimage to exterminate sins and absolve offences; for here be seminaries and masse priests, which doe take down the pride of their flesh more than a voyage to the Holy Land or a hair shirt in Lent.

"It is an evil which doth banish a man from all contentments, wherein his actions do so terrifie him, that it makes a man grow desperate.

"To conclude, what is it not? In a word, it is the very idea of all misery and torment; it converts joy into sorrow, riches into poverty, and ease into discontentments."

Minshull expends the whole force of his satire on inhuman creditors. His pen on this topic hits the true Juvenal strain; yet he willingly excuses the creditor, who employs constraint

Hosted by Google

and the strong arm of the law, to obtain his due, which he needs to prevent his coming hither himself.

A choice essay on 'Choice of Company in Prison,' commences thus: "Wouldst thou learn to dispute well? Be an excellent sophister. Wouldst thou dispute of foreign affairs, and be an excellent linguist? I counsel thee to travel. Wouldst thou be of a pleasing and affectionate behaviour? Frequent the court. *Wouldst thou dive into the secret villanies of man?* Lye in prison." He divides all the different varieties of prison companions into three sorts. 1. A parasite. 2. A John indifferente. 3. A true-hearted Titus: 'the masculine sweetheart.' On visitors to the prisoners he is pretty hard: ascribing their assumed condolence to mere curiosity. He is, perhaps, unjust in his almost universal censure; though all prisoners are not so fortunate as was Leigh Hunt, who had his wife and children, and books, and flowers, and music, and pure fancies, and sweet thoughts. This innocent prisoner and fine writer had a noble company of visitors: some of them daily companions, Shelley, Charles Lamb, Tom Moore, Horace Smith, Miss Lamb, William Hazlitt, Jeremy Bentham. A delightful subject for an article, for Hunt himself would be a paper on the great and good men, who have by any mischance become inmates of a prison: and of the admirable books written there.

In one respect, Minshull bears some resemblance to Cobbet, *i. e.*, in taking awkward nick-names on the objects of his aversion. He speaks, by way of irony, of his entertainments and entertainers in prison: the guard at the gate is a Cerberus, of whom there is a terrific print on the title page: his 'chamber-fellows' are Threadbare and Monilesse: the gardener, Potherb; the steward, Cut-throate; the cook, Mistress Mutton Chops; the keeper who accompanies the prisoners when they walk without the prison, Argus.

Hosted by Google

Upon the jailors Minshull expends all the bitterness, of which the humanity of his nature was capable. He represents them as devils rather than men, which, indeed, it is the tendency of their functions to make them.

The verses prefixed to the treatise, we think, comprise the sum of the matter:

A prison is a house of care,
A place where none can thrive,
A touch-stone true to try a friend,
A grave for one alive:
Sometimes a place of right,
Sometimes a place of wrong,
Sometimes a place for rogues and thieves,
And honest men among.

XXXII

ON PREACHING.

I never printed a sermon but upon compulsion, except one. There is enough and too much of that sort of work. Better discourses on morality cannot be had than hundreds the world is in possession of.—*Abp. Herring, Let.* xiv.

'Tis good to preach the same thing again; for that is the way to have it learned. You see a bird by often whistling, to learn a tune, and a month after to record it to herself.—*Selden.—Table-Talk.*

When we consider the frequency of the occasion, the nobleness of the topics, their supreme importance, the efficacy of the act well performed, the genius requisite, the variety of congregations, the number of preachers, we are at a complete stand to account for the deplorably low state of preaching.

Hosted by Google

This confession, extorted from us by the facts of the case, may afford matter of astonishment to many who are very well satisfied with the present state of the pulpit—who ask for nothing better—who perhaps could not comprehend anything superior. We have always been well pleased at the recollection of that passage in the Spectator, where Sir Roger de Coverly's parish clergyman being asked who was to preach on the next Sunday for him, replied, "The Bishop of St. Asaph in the morning, and Doctor South in the afternoon"—meaning that he intended reading a sermon from those great divines on both occasions. We heartily wish some of the divines of this day would have the courage, as well as the good sense, to adopt a similar practice at suitable opportunities. In point of essential merit, no critic, any way qualified, would hesitate to give the preference to one of South's best sermons over a majority of modern discourses even by divines of considerable eminence. What pithiness of sense and point of expression in the old divines! What weakness, flaccidity, baldness, in the present race! If the excessive length of Barrow, or the local satire of South, or the extravagant erudition and overflowing fancy of Taylor, be excepted to, let Barrow be condensed, expurgate South, and prune the excrescences of the Bishop of Down and Connor. Taste, no mean talents, judgment, are requisite for the selection and purgation, and only to the hands of a first-rate man would we consign the task. Inferior intellects. if admitted, on the plea of piety, into the Church at all, should not pretend to this, but take the best sermons as they find them. It is not for them to abuse and dislocate the fine thoughts of genius, which learning may have overloaded, or temporary allusions render faint and obscure. It is almost presumption in a man of equal genius, to try his skill on the same subjects

Hosted by Google

that have engaged the attention of those master intellects; for Cowley to attempt a flight with the Theban eagle. It is absolute profanation for a petty parson to endeavor to hurl the thunders of avenging justice, or to imitate the silver eloquence of an Angel of Mercy.

From the practice of reading the best published sermons of standard and orthodox divines, two good results, if no more, would follow; the art of elocution would be much more attended to, and the sermons could be studied and carefully meditated, by which means the preacher might deliver them with greater effect. We suspect that many a minister would then understand his theme better than now, that he is obliged to write so frequently and at such comparatively short notice.

To this practice the majority of congregations might demur, so strong is the hold of ancient usage upon men's minds. The curse of political seems to be the predominant vice of religious corporations, viz.: a blindness to innovation—even when wholesome reform; a prejudice in favor of existing practices. Many good people appear to suspect indolence or indifference on the part of a preacher who reads a printed sermon. They call it an imposition. They must have a return for the salary. But is a meagre discourse from your parson as well worth your attention as a sermon from the lips of the English Chrysostoms and Austins? As it is, are they all original preachers who deliver written sermons? A sermon may be transferred as well as anything else. There are other "conveyances" besides those of a legal description. The very critics, who speak so authoritatively, are not always acquainted with the sources of the finest thoughts and most sparkling fancies. When they abuse the preacher's tediousness, they may be reflecting

Hosted by Google

upon Tillotson; and when pleased with a graceful expression, they may be only assenting to the sentiment of Sherlock or Atterbury.

In no department of literature perhaps (considered as such) is a greater decline more manifestly evident than in the eloquence of the pulpit. Most of the current spoken eloquence is confessedly very vapid, and even tiresome, when transferred to paper. Sergeant Talfourd, a man of elegant poetic talent, and a popular debater, a very considerable portion of whose enviable reputation is derived from his efforts at the bar and in the House, acknowledges the fact in explicit terms in his memoirs of Charles Lamb. This declaration, from the pen of the author of Ion, should certainly weigh as powerful evidence with those who consider the transitory impressions a practical and fluent speaker can create as incomparably superior to the elaborate thought and rich fancy of the studious author. There are popular speakers, both in the pulpit and in the Senate, whose oratorical art enables them to control or excite the passions at will, who yet prudently abstain from publication, and thus tacitly confess the decay of the literature of eloquence and their inferiority as writers. It is no disgrace for a man to be inferior in one department, merely because he is excellent in another. Speaking and writing are separate arts, and the distinct merits of each are only confounded by those who cannot discriminate, but know only how to extol or condemn. The nice shades of difference, which constitute this (so real) distinction, are perfectly perceptible and unquestionably true. We are acquainted with, and have listened to, brilliant speakers whose written compositions are below mediocrity, or, at best, only on a par with it. But this should not oblige us to deny the palpable fact of the

Hosted by Google

great scarcity of good, not to say excellent, sermons published now-a-days.

A defect of literary accomplishment, then, among the body of the clergy, may be taken as the cause of the inferiority of modern sermons; style and manner are not sufficiently attended to. Art is neglected, and yet pulpit eloquence is an art, as much so as political, and a higher art, at the same time. Natural eloquence is not enough by itself; it must be trimmed and trained by scholarship, research, elegance and breeding. To the sacred character of Divine must be appended the no less valuable, though less sacred characters of scholar, critic, orator, and gentleman. Arrayed in such vestments, the clerical character shines the leading order. Deprived of these accessory qualities and ornaments, it is likely to be abused and degraded.

The clergy and religious critics of certain denominations appear to think just the reverse of this to be the correct view. Learning and eloquence, they seem to hold in puritanical abhorrence, and to consider the cause of religion disgraced by the splendid displays of human genius. They oppose taste to piety, and an evangelical spirit, to an inventive imagination; as if for a moment, a man of sense could conceive any preference, or even hint at a comparison; such parallels are offensive, both to religion and criticism. Narrow bigots! ought they not rather to regard the highest efforts of intellectual power as the truest adoration of the Supreme Being? To honor or glorify that sacred name,—is it not the loftiest occupation of humanity? A hymn to His praise, the sublimest strain of poesy? insomuch that a man can evince no higher ambition than that of the great preacher.

Hosted by Google

The perfect pulpit-orator should be a saint and an orator united; a Paul, an Augustine, a Jeremy Taylor. No years of study, no libraries, no studious pursuits are wasted on him whose office it is to minister at the altar. His is the highest of all duties—that of Adoration and Prayer: to perform these duties with dignity, ignorance is by no means the most fitting preparative.

A consequence of this vitiated style of composition is seen in the vitiated taste of audiences. They take their standard from contemporary preaching (few scholars constituting modern congregations), and that standard is, too often, a low one.

The spirit of the age, also, hostile to fanciful illustration, or refined speculation in sacred discourses, and rather looking to utilitarian logic, has, we are apt to imagine, cast a chilling influence over the imagination, and rendered the warm and glowing appeals tame and cold.

Be the causes what they may, however, the fact remains, of a very certain declension in the eloquence of the chair (as the French term Pulpit Oratory), since the days of the old divines. Whether they were a privileged race of men, had stronger thoughts, and more capacious heads, or more affectionate and philanthropic hearts, we will not attempt to determine. That they were far better scholars than the present race, is confessed; that they had more poetry in them, is granted—and it is also admitted, that their poetry did their piety no material injury; nay, that it heightened and refined it. The old English Divines form a choice department in a library of old English literature. It has been said that a complete library could be formed from their works alone, and that, too, a most valuable collection. For though Divines, they were none the less wits, historians, scholars, and moralists. In this

Hosted by Google

respect they differ from the French pulpit orators, who were either mere declaimers or else scholastic controversialists. The English Divines wrote not merely sermons and works of scholastic divinity—but they wrote books of moral essays, characters, satires; works on life and manners. They had wit and humor as well as fancy and sentiment. They were not merely the spiritual guides, but also the popular writers of the day. They had large capacity of reason and richness of imagination. They were picturesque, pointed, practical. Not merely fine writers, they were deep thinkers and acute observers. There is a substance and solidity in every one of them that would furnish out a score of modern writers with brains. Barrow alone would cut up into a dozen fashionable lecturers, and Taylor might serve as a resource for the poets of at least one generation. Hall and Donne, as satirists, might send Gifford and Byron to school to learn their art; and Earle is at least as knowing as William Cobbett.

In their books we find not only the noblest doctrines of a true Christian morality, heightened by pure religion, but we also discover profound speculations on human nature, and a truer insight into the characters of men. We have there preserved for us the truest pictures of that time, and the ruling tendencies of that age.

They were thus not only scholars and preachers, but also men of the world (in a good sense), and men of reflection.

As writers, and chiefly as writers of sermons, we shall consider them, leaving controversy and their individual tenets out of the question. The moot points of that day, and indeed of every age, interest but very few; but the wholesome doctrines and high principles these writings contain, are good at and in all times. They have good thoughts for our times, and noble thoughts for the best seasons. To the student,

Hosted by Google

their works are full of thought and learning; to the speculatist, they are full of high aims and generous aspirations; to to the afflicted, they contain the surest consolation, next to the Scriptures themselves.

We beg leave to premise, on the very threshold of these criticisms, that we write not for the professional reader, who, doubtless, is at least equally well, if not (as he should be) much better acquainted than we can be with these old writers; but for the general inquirer, who may be easily repelled in his researches, by unfortunately stumbling on the worst scribblers of that time. At that time, as now, there were a large class of writers, crude thinkers; and such are ever in the majority. Old English literature may be compared to the book-closet in an old-fashioned country house, which contains a vast variety of learned lumber and useless trash; still, here and there a rare volume; an old manuscript of great value; a set of books, entirely preserved, of some fruitful and popular writer years ago. These have all been tumbled in together in one medley. Even in many otherwise worthless books he will find a brilliant page or two, or a curious chapter, or erudite notes, or a fantastic appendix. The very titles and mottoes of some these curious treatises cannot fail to breed some speculation; the prefaces and dedications form materials for a literary history of the time.

If the student has never happened upon these writers before, he will be surprised to find a manly vigor of thought and independence of expression in them, of which very few examples remain at the present day.

It is to be wondered at the ignorance on this subject. Most readers regard all that is old as trite, and speak of the great body of English divines as dull and tiresome.

A point not sufficiently regarded is the admirable morality

Hosted by Google

of these divines; not only the Christian morality (the highest) of their writings, but also the wide and liberal range of their sympathies as men. They not only taught as Christian ministers, but also felt as men and for their fellow-creatures. There is more humanity in their moral teaching than in any of the professed books on morality. They are more truly moral than the merely technical teachers of morality. Passages even occur in their works of a tendency to which the strait-laced professors of later times might object, as free and latitudinarian; they are more compassionate than censorious. Do not these objectors forget, however, that the severest moralist in judging of himself may be, and, indeed, ought to be, the most merciful in his judgment of others? The true Christian is not he who finds most errors in other sects or n dividuals. Rebuke is not religion, nor captiousness Christianity. "Judge not, that ye be not judged," is a cardinal rule of Christian conduct.

Equally sound and admirable are the old divines in point of Christian doctrine. The squeamish churchman need never fear to contract any taint of heresy, or run foul of any disputed and doubtful dogmas in their writings. As writers and thinkers, they are above all praise. In the language of a fine writer, also a judicious admirer of these old worthies: "It is well to moralize with Hall, and raise the fancy with the imagination of Taylor; to raise the flame of piety with Herbert, or to be jested into seriousness by the points of Fuller."

The defects of contemporary preaching are two-fold: literary and religious. We must premise two considerations before entering upon these points of criticism. Preaching is too general to have any special efficacy. It is directed against vice and sin in the abstract: it enforces virtue and goodness

Hosted by Google

in the general. It recognises passions and sentiments, rather than a separate act or an individual feeling. It wants particularity. The preacher addresses his congregation, rather than any single member of it. Perhaps there is no speciality in his ideas; he may himself entertain only general impressions of the beauty of holiness or the heinousness of crime. His own soul may not be truly alive to the convictions of his reason; his own spirit may not be wholly imbued with his own doctrines. As a matter of course, he can produce no impression, who feels no strong motives for exciting any.

Preaching is also too frequent. It is made too common. In the early history of the Church, priests, or at least one class of them, were allowed to preach only at stated times, some, if we are not mistaken, not oftener than once a month. This, too, at a time when preaching, as a means of making proselytes, was much more essential to the growth of the Church than at present.

The true intent of preaching, the object of a sermon, it seems to us, is not comprehended. We are impressed with the truth, that a preacher should teach rather than declaim; convince than speculate; persuade than exhort, and not merely amuse or entertain. His business is to teach men doctrine and duty; but, of the two, duty rather than doctrine, as practice is more important than opinion. He must be himself sincere, if he would gain influence; and of his sincerity, a good life is the only test. He must speak from experience, who would speak with authority. The mere orator in the pulpit is contemptible. What audacity to play off rhetorical tricks before High Heaven for the admiration of a gaping crowd! At the same time, severely as we repudiate hollow display, even of the finest genius,

Hosted by Google

we yet hold the noblest exercise of the faculties to be the worship and adoration of the Almighty Father. To his service should the richest genius the costliest research, the most accomplished talents, be dedicated; yet with humility, and all in his honor.

The pulpit should be the school, the lecture-room, the press for the people. How many glean all their scanty stock from the preacher! Many take all their religious and moral views from their clergyman. This alone should incline us to fix the standard of preaching high, to make it very comprehensive.

Of all the varieties of preaching, we place the moral discourse at the head; that which impresses our highest duties and directs our familiar offices; that which regards man as a social creature, as well as a spiritual being; that which, in its zeal for heavenly things does not overlook the period spent here on this bank and shoal of time! Such preaching is Christian, for it is after the model of the Sermon on the Mount—that compend of Christian duties. Much idle cant has been expended on a distinction between evangelical and moral sermons; as if a good moralist was not, from the philosophical nature of the case, religious. Not that morality is better than religion. It is as good. It is the same with it. It is Christianity applied to action. Christianity is, in a word, a divine morality. The law of God and the moral law coincide, are contemporary. Morality is not only as old as the creation, but existed long before it—before all time—in the bosom of the Supreme Being. An awful sense of duty governs all beneath the Creator of the world down to the meanest of his intelligent and responsible creatures. This we would have preached. The most sterling of the old divines afford abundant precedents. The sermons of Barrow in par-

Hosted by Google

ticular are almost entirely moral treatises. Tillotson founds revelation on the law of nature; and speaks of the latter as antecedent to the former.

Evangelical piety, often pure and sincere, has as often been assumed by those who, disregarding the common rules of morality, expect from their very wickedness to shine out as brilliant lights;—"the greater sinner, the greater saint." Is it harsh to suspect such repentance half the time? About strict morality, there can be less mistake. It affords ground for fewer deceptions.

There is another vulgar (though time-honored) error regarding the personal character of the priest, which would teach us a bad man may still be a good priest; that the office sanctifies the clerical acts of the incumbent. This cannot be so. It is too revolting to common reason, let the sophisms of controversialists be marshalled as they may. For our own part (and we think we share the feeling with many) we cannot hear the sermon of a preacher, let him be ever so eloquent or acute, if we do not reverence his personal character. The two are inseparable—and of the two, the man should predominate. When the man is good and the priest is perfect in his function, then we find the true character. The formalist and the hypocrite sometimes usurp his place, and in passing we will glance at each. The formalist in the pulpit is as injurious to the cause of religion as the sceptic in company; perhaps more hurtful, because with less art, and without an avowed design. The one disgusts the man of sense and sincere Christian; the other, by specious logic, alarms the wary and puts his opponents on their guard. We find a passage in Mr. Emerson's Divinity Address so germane to the matter, that we cannot forbear quoting it:—

"Whenever the pulpit is usurped by a formalist, then is

Hosted by Google

the worshipper defrauded and disconsolate. We shrink as soon as the prayers begin, which do not uplift, but smite and offend us. We are fain to wrap our cloak about us, and secure as best we can, a solitude that hears not. I once heard a preacher who sorely tempted me to say, I would go to church no more. Men go, thought I, where they are wont to go, else had no soul entered the temple in the afternoon. A snow-storm was falling around us. The snow-storm was real, the preacher merely spectral; and the eye felt the sad contrast in looking at him, and then out of the window behind him into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had not one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended, or cheated, or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth, he had not learned. Not one fact in all his experience had he yet imported into his doctrine. This man had ploughed and planted, and talked, and bought, and sold; he had read books; he had eaten and drunken; his head aches; his heart throbs; he smiles and suffers; yet there was not a surmise, a hint in all the discourse that he had ever lived at all. Not a line did he draw out of real history. The true preacher can always be known by this, that he deals out to the people his life,—life passed through the fire of thought. But of the bad preacher, it could not be told from his sermon, what age of the world he fell in; whether he had a father or a child; whether he was a freeholder or a pauper; whether he was a citizen or a countryman, or any other fact of his biography."

The hypocrite is much worse, and, next to the man of cold, malicious heart, the worst man in the world. Cant, always

Hosted by Google

despicable, in the pulpit is blasphemy. Yet there is a cant (if we are not wrong) without hypocrisy; a professional style of speech, an assumption of using common words in a particular and pedantic sense. Such is the phrase, "professing" Christian, a puritanical expression, that has become quite common; a presumptuous term, vain-glorious, pharisaical. The character of the good parson is far removed from either of these.

From two masterly essays (a little too formally cut, perhaps, for the present day); the one by an old English master, Owen Felltham, and the other, the production of the prince of French moralists, Labruyère, we select a few passages equally striking and true. Owen Felltham, in his admirable Resolves, in an essay on Preaching [he was a sort of amateur divine himself, and lived in an age of the very finest, and also of the most indifferent pulpit eloquence, according as you study the works of the very first divines, or the merely statistical or chronological discourses of mere "enumerators," as Labruyère himself calls the most tedious class of exhorters], has these just thoughts thus curtly and a little pedantically set forth:

"The excess which is in the defect of preaching, has made the pulpit slighted; I mean the much bad oratory we find it guilty of. It is a wonder to me how men can preach so little and so long, so long at a time and so little matter; as if they thought to please by the inculcation of their vain tautologies. I see no reason that so high a Princess as Divinity is, should be presented to the people in the sordid rags of the tongue; nor that he, which speaks from the Father of languages, should deliver his embassage in an ill one. A man can never speak too well, where he speaks not too obscure. Long and distended clauses are both tedious to the ear and

Hosted by Google

difficult for their retaining. A sentence well couched takes both the sense and the understanding. I love not those cart-rope speeches that are longer than the memory of man can fathom. I see not but that divinity put into apt significants, might ravish as well as poetry.

"The weighty lines men find upon the stage, I am persuaded, have been the means to draw away the pulpit's followers. We complain of drowsiness at a sermon, when a play of doubled length leads us on still with alacrity. But the fault is not all in ourselves. If we saw divinity acted, the gesture and variety would as much invigorate. But it is too high to be personated by humanity."

The last sentence recalls to memory the pithy reply of Barron, the famous French actor, who, on being asked why the stage produced more forcible effects than the pulpit, made answer, that they [the actors] represented things feigned as if they were real, whereas the divines treated the most important themes in such an indifferent manner as to appear as if they hardly credited their own representations.

"At a sermon well dressed, what understanding can have a motion to sleep? Divinity well ordered, casts forth a bait which angles the soul into the ear, and how can that close when such a guest sits in it? They are sermons but of baser metals which lead the eyes to slumber. And should we have a continued oration, upon such a subject as the stage treats on, in such words as we hear some sermons, I am confident it would not only be far more tedious, but nauseous and contemptful. The most advantage they have of other places is in their good lives and actions; for it is certain Cicero and Roscius are the most complete when they both make but man." * * * * * *

"I grieve that anything so excellent as divinity is, should

Hosted by Google

fall into a sluggish handling. Sure though other interposures do eclipse her, yet this is a principal. I never yet knew a good tongue that wanted ears to hear it. I will honor her in her plain trim; but I will wish to meet in her, graceful jewels, not that they give addition to her goodness, but that she is more persuasive in working on the soul she meets with. When I meet with worth which I cannot overlove, I can well endure that art which is a means to heighten liking. Confections that are cordial are not the worse, but the better, for being gilded."

Labruyère, in his admirable chapter of the Pulpit, in his famous book of characters and manners of the present age, has exhausted the whole topic, with his habitual acuteness and profound judgment. We transcribe some of the most striking passages, to show what this keen observer and just critic thought of the matter. The truths he states are of universal application, as fresh now as when they were first written—more than a century and a half ago. The translation is by *Rowe*, the dramatist, and extremely well done. It preserves the propriety of the thoughts, the nicety of the distinctions, and all the point of the original. It is, in a word, almost the best prose translation from French into English, that we at present remember:—

"Preaching is now-a-days become a mere show; that evangelic gravity, the life of preaching, is absolutely laid aside; an advantageous mien, a pretty tone of voice, exactness of gesture, choice of expression, and long enumerations, supply its place. To attend seriously on the Dispensation of the Holy Word is no longercustomary, going to church is an amusement among a thousand others, and preaching a diversion. The preachers play for the prize, and the hearers bet upon their heads. * * * * *

Hosted by Google

"Profane eloquence is transferred from the bar, where it formerly reigned, to the pulpit, where it never ought to come.

"On the vain, unprofitable sermons now-a-days; the time of the Homilies is no more; the Basils, the Chrysostoms could not restore it; we should fly into other diocesses to get out of the reach of their voices and their familiar discourses. The generality of men love fine phrases and handsome periods; admire what they do not understand; fancy themselves to be informed; content with deciding between the first and second doctrine, or between the last sermon or the last but one."

Dr. Eachard, in his admirable book on the contempt of the clergy, enumerates most of the vices of bad preaching. An early Spanish satirist, the author of the history of Friar Gerund, has hit off very spirited caricatures of the prevalent faults of the clergy of his day—Ciceronians, Jesuits, and others; while Erasmus, with his delicate irony, and good Father Latimer, with his old English strength and sincerity, have handsomely satirized the lazy drones, ignorant monks, and "bells without clappers," "dumb dogs," &c., of their age. To give the reader a fair taste of the French wit, we transcribe the following pithy passages:—

"The Bishop of Meaux and Father Bourdaloue recall to my mind Demosthenes and Cicero. Both of them absolute masters of the eloquence of the pulpit, have had the fate of other great models; one of them has made a great many ill censures, the other a great many ill imitators."

* * * *

"A preacher, methinks, ought in every one of his sermons, to make choice of one principal truth, whether it be to move terror or yield instruction, to handle that alone largely and

Hosted by Google

fully, omitting all those foreign divisions and subdivisions which are so intricate and perplexed. I would not have him pre-suppose a thing really false, which is, that the great or the genteel men understand the religion they profess, and so be afraid to instruct persons of their wit and breeding in their catechism; let him employ the long time others are composing a set, formal discourse, in making, that the turn and expressions may, of course, flow easily from him. Let him, after necessary preparation, yield himself up to his own genius, and to the emotions with which a great subject will inspire him; let him spare those prodigious efforts of memory which look more like reciting for a wager than anything serious, and which destroy all graceful action; let him, on the contrary, by a noble enthusiasm dart conviction into the soul and alarm the conscience; let him, in fine, touch the hearts of his hearers with another fear than that of seeing him make some blunder or halt in his sermon.

"Let not him who is not yet arrived to such perfection, as to forget himself in the dispensation of the holy word; let not him, I say, be discouraged by the austere rules prescribed him, as if they robbed him of the means of showing his genius and attaining the honors to which he aspires. What greater or more noble talent can there be than to preach like an Apostle, or which deserves a bishoprick better? Was Fenelon unworthy of that dignity? Was it possible he should have escaped his Prince's choice, but for another choice?"

To descend from the epigram of Labruyère to plain prose and critical commentary. The style of sermons cannot be too plain and simple, in general. The text should be perfectly clear and earnest. Strength and seriousness are chief qualities. Let it be rather a labored plainness than a labored

Hosted by Google

elegance. The greatest truths, like the richest gems, show best plain set. The best character, for a writer of sermons, is Ben Jonson's character of Cartwright, the Dramatist, who was also a preacher. "He, my son Cartwright, writes all like a man." Joined to this manly sense let there be a liberal spirit of humanity, a sympathy with men as men; compassion and fellow-feeling. Let suavity modify the rigor of your doctrines, and let a Christian feeling overspread your whole spirit. Thus we would address the preacher.

Action and gesture, when natural, are always right—when artificial, very seldom. To the youthful student we would further say, the old Divines afford a good school, but a knowledge of human nature is better. Still, of the old Divines drink your fill—of wisdom, and fancy, and piety, and acute knowledge, and ability of every kind. What pictures, and fair conceits, and rich harmonies, in Taylor! what ingenius thoughts, so fine, so delicate, in Donne! what massy arguments in Barrow and Sherlock: and he that reads the contemporaries of these old masters, will confess them to have written as with a crisped pen.

XXXIII.

DR. JOHN W. FRANCIS.*

PERHAPS nowhere throughout these United States is there to be found one, who unites so many various characters as Dr. Francis; whether we look upon him in the light of a highly

* Abridged from S. Quart. Rev., June 1851.

Hosted by Google

scientific and skilful physician; a general polite scholar; a lover of the whole family of the arts; an acute inquirer into every branch of science; an accurate and philosophical antiquary, yet fresh and lively in his sympathies with the world as it moves; a humane, kindly, generous philanthropist; a converser full of spirit and resources, and the general friend of authors and scholars.

Dr. John W. Francis is a native of the city of New York. In 1807, he commenced his professional course of study under the late Dr. Hosack, at that period one of the most prominent physicians in New York, and Professor of Materia Medica and Botany in Columbia College. In 1809, the young medical student was graduated Bachelor of Arts from Columbia College:—receiving his degree of M. D. in 1811, from the College of Physicians and Surgeons; a distinct institution which had been established in 1807. Of this academy Dr. Samuel Bard was the first President, and Dr. Francis the first graduate, whose name is recorded in the College Album. On this score, and in one sense, therefore, Dr. Francis, though still in the prime of life, with his faculties and talents as vigorous as those of an active and energetic man of forty, may be called the leader, and be placed at the head of the medical body of the city, if not of the State, in point of talents, skill, and learning.

From his earliest youth a severe student, and blessed with a constitution which admitted of it, he has been, through life, a hard worker in the fields of acquisition, and of practical beneficence.

Soon after he commenced the practice of his profession, he received a flattering proposition from Dr. Hosack, his eminent instructor, to accept a copartnership with him in his practice, with which he closed. This union lasted till 1820; since

Hosted by Google

which time he has been without any partner in his laborious duties.

Nearly contemporaneous with his partnership, Dr. F. was appointed lecturer on the Institutes of Medicine and the Materia Medica. In 1813, he was appointed Professor of Materia Medica, at the early age (for such a post) of twenty-three years. With characteristic generosity, he taught gratuitously, and delivered his first public course of instruction to a class of one hundred and twenty students.

About this time, he made his trip to Europe, for the purpose of adding to his own rich stores, and of bringing home all the latest improvements in his art, for the benefit of the profession and of society. He was absent but a single year; but, during that period, managed to see more, (which was all carefully treasured up,) than most men would in a sojourn of thrice the length. He visited the great hospitals, and sat, an attentive listener, at the lectures of the celebrated professors of the day. With most of these he was intimate, and was cordially received by such men as Gregory, Brewster and Brown, in Scotland; McCartney and Sheridan, in Ireland; Denon, Cuvier and Gall, in France. Abernethy, amongst the most distinguished in London, the sarcastic wit and most able practitioner, welcomed him with open arms, and offered him a share of his immense practice. What higher eulogium could we present of a young American physician!

Dr. Francis traversed England, Ireland, Scotland, France and Holland: on returning home, he brought a valuable library with him, which has been greatly augmented since in extent and value.

In 1817, Dr. Francis, in connexion with his other duties, filled the chair of Medical Jurisprudence; in 1819, that of Professor of Obstetrics, in addition to his former branch of

Hosted by Google

Medical Jurisprudence. So thoroughly versed is this master of his profession in all its branches, that he could turn from one department to another, with the same facility a clever surgeon can perform a variety of operations. And, as a sufficient proof of his largeness of spirit and true generosity in this single channel, we may state that, for nearly twenty years, Dr. Francis devoted from four to six hours a-day, in instruction alone, at a time, too, when he was occupied with his private and increasing practice.

With Dr. Hosack, Dr. Francis edited the American and Medical Register, and in which he wrote a great deal This periodical reached four volumes, and was almost entirely filled with original matter. Dr. Francis edited the standard edition of Denman's Midwifery.

In conjunction with Drs. Dyckman and Beck, he edited the New York Medical and Physical Journal, until the termination of the third volume.

It must be confessed, that our Doctor has done his full share towards paying that debt every eminent man owes to his profession. New York has produced not only some of the ablest lawyers, but she can boast to have given birth to some of the most admirable physicians our country can display.

In his professional character towards his brethren of the faculty, he is liberal, frank, cordial; free from all jealousies and petty meanness; a model of conduct and courtesy. In charities, professional and pecuniary, he is as munificent as he is unostentatious; doing constantly good by stealth, and realizing the delightful picture drawn of Garth by his affectionate friend, that prince of gentlemen, and elegant writers, Sir Richard Steele.

In 1820, he retired from these chairs, which he resigned at

Hosted by Google

the same time, with Drs. Hosack, Mott, Mackneven, Mitchell and Post.

Since that period, Dr. Francis has been one of the busiest of practitioners—one of the most arduous among professional and general students—an indefatigable writer of the first class, on all the various subjects that have come under his pen, and prominently engaged in all the literary, artistic and social institutions of New York city. A lover of society and conversation, he is no less a cordial host than an engaging companion. His house is the resort of artists and authors, of travellers and divines, and, indeed, of all clever and agreeable people, who can contribute aught to good conversation, or understand the art of listening.

For authors and literary men, the Doctor has always cherished a fondness, arising from sympathy and mutual admiration. Extensively and minutely read in polite literature, with a memory most tenacious, and yet most ready—an unerring judgment and generous feeling, for every kind of excellence—he is a true lover of literature, without cant or pretence.

He is equally fond of art and artists—an enthusiast in music, painting and the drama. His portrait has been painted by at least eight or ten of the first artists, from Leslie, in London, to Elliott, perhaps the most spirited American portrait painter of the present day. A miniature by Wenzler, is thought to convey the most faithful resemblance. The portrait by Elliott, was done for the Art-Union, at their request, of which institution Dr. Francis was the first President, and with Herring, the original projector.

Music, in all its forms, from the simplicity of the old ballads, to the rich musical art of the opera, finds a hearty admirer in the Doctor.

Hosted by Google

Of the stage, in its best days, he was a great admirer and nice judge. From Cooke to Macready, he has had all the great actors for his patients and friends. Kean is his idol of these, the truest tragic genius since Garrick.

His anecdotes of these eminent performers, elicit the attention of the most indifferent, and in the Old Knickerbocker Magazine, of New York, we have a rich display of facts touching the career of both Cooke and Kean. His epitaph on Cooke's monument, in St. Paul's Church Yard, is widely known and appreciated.

> Three kingdoms claim his birth;
> Both hemispheres pronounce his worth.

Celebrities, domestic and foreign, he cherishes with peculiar fondness; and modest merit, that blossoms into very moderate public uccess, finds a kind and ready friend in him. He is a member of the Ethnological Society; for years was one of the most prominent leaders of the New York Historical Society, which he contributed greatly to establish, and which is indebted to him for many valuable gifts and great pecuniary support. We believe, from its formation, he was the chief physician of the St. Nicholas Society, whose annual dinner he enlivens with his witty budget.

Such books as Watson's Annals, and Dunlap's Histories of the Stage and Arts of Design, owe much to him.

Mr. Poe, in an admirable sketch, a little over-colored, in his Literati, thus graphically paints the address and conversational powers of Dr. Francis:

"His address is the most genial that can be conceived—its *bon-hommie* irresistible. He speaks in a loud, clear, hearty tone, dogmatically, and his head thrown back and his chest

Hosted by Google

out; never waits for an introduction to any lady; slaps a perfect stranger on the back, and calls him 'Doctor' or 'Learned Theban;' pats every lady on the head, and (if she be pretty and *petite*,) designates her by some such title as 'My pocket edition of the Lives of the Saints.' His conversation proper is a sort of Roman punch, made up of tragedy, comedy, and the broadest of all possible farces. He has a natural, felicitous flow of talk, always overswelling the boundaries and sweeping everything before it, right and left. He is very earnest, intense, emphatic; thumps the table with his fist; shocks the nerves of the ladies. His *forte*, after all, is humor, the richest conceivable,—a compound of Swift, Rabelais, and the clown in the pantomime."

Of his writings, miscellaneous and medical, we have space but for a brief *resumé*.

The Address before the Agricultural Society is an elegant essay, giving the history of the art, and the views held respecting it, in the chief epochs of modern civilization in England, France, and this country in particular. It is full of ingenious suggestions, and is studded with vivid portraits of the great patrons of this, one of the most delightful of the fine arts, and which is constantly on the advance in this country.

The Address before the Literary Society of Columbia College is mainly devoted to a masterly biographical sketch of Chancellor Livingston, with which President Madison was so much gratified, that he wrote Dr. Francis a congratulatory letter of thanks, for this valuable contribution to American history. As this Address is now out of print, the reader will thank us for telling him that a very full extract from it, comprising the essential portion, may be read in Knapp's American Biography, which forms the Sixth part of the Treasury of Knowledge.—[New York: Conner & Cooke. 1833.]

Hosted by Google

The letter on the cholera, and the observations on the Avon waters, are highly valuable medical papers. The former has attracted general notice, been translated and recommended at Havana, by the authorities. During the three seasons of cholera in New York city—in 1832, in 1834, and in 1849—Dr. Francis was untiring, ever at his post, a devoted and faithful practitioner and philanthropist, fearless of danger to himself, though full of a noble anxiety for others, adapting his profound science with readiness, and most efficient skill, to the disease. During the yellow fever of 1822, and the previous visitation of that scourge, he was indefatigable, and came very near being added to the list of the victims. What hero so bold, what soldier so daring, as the dauntless physician, full of knowledge, hope and spirit, in such a crisis? Truly did the poet exclaim, of the skillful Machaon:

> "A wise physician, skill'd our wounds to heal,
> Is more than armies to the public weal."
>
> POPE'S *Homer's Iliad,* Book xi., 636-7.

The sulphur springs, at Avon, have relieved many a sufferer, and many who imbibe these life-restoring waters little know to whom they are indebted for the clearest elucidation of their virtues which has been given to the public. New York is as rich as Virginia in sulphur springs. There are three, of the very first class; at Richfield, Otsego county, some fourteen miles from Cooperstown, (of which we can speak from personal knowledge of their admirably curative effects,) at Sharon, the more fashionable resort, and at Avon.

The discourse on Natural History is worthy of a review by itself—so full, so comprehensive, and yet so compact. It is a succinct treatise, which, by a little of the arts of com-

Hosted by Google

position, might be readily expanded into a volume. This discourse developes an immense variety of scientific knowledge, and, for style, is deserving of very high praise, and has been, in connection with his other addresses and biographies, justly characterized as "models of fine writing, just sufficiently tamed down by an indomitable common sense."

The Anniversary Discourse, before the Academy of Medicine, we must select, however, as *the* work, by which those who are yet to read these fine pieces of composition, may get the general idea of the style and manner of our author. And we may here add, that, among the various collections of "Miscellanies," "Literary Remains," etc., so frequently put forth, few volumes will be more interesting than one containing a selection from the addresses, discourses, and biographical notices of Dr. Francis.

We had the pleasure of hearing this admirable oration. It was delivered before an audience of nearly four thousand persons, the majority professional and scientific, with the flower of New York society and fashion. About as large a number as obtained entrance into the Tabernacle were obliged to leave, for want of space to accommodate them, and the fact deserves to be recorded, that no scientific discourse has ever collected so large an audience, or commanded such profound attention, in New York city—a discourse of over one hundred printed pages, and occupying over two hours in the delivery, that could so fix the attention of such an assemblage, must have had rare merits. It is, indeed, an encyclopedic *resumé* of the present state of the art, in all of its departments, of each of which, from long study and wide practice, the orator was master; comprehensive and yet concise, richly freighted with learning,

Hosted by Google

strong sense and broad views, in its historical portion, while its biographical reminiscences were full of life and spirit. In its latter half, it contains a gallery of medical portraits, of the great lights of the profession, now extinct.

The New York feeling of the author comes up, at times, most agreeably. Dr. Francis, a true Knickerbocker, watches with pride the progress of New York city. Full as well as any writer he referred to, on this ground, did he devote himself to it; he could accumulate a mass of information, antiquarian and statistical, as well as picturesque and humorous, that would give the slanderers of New York pain, and show that she had a distinct character and claims of her own, not to be set aside. Of much of the discourse, only a professional reader can justly appreciate the thoroughness and accuracy. But there are portions all must admire.

Biography has been a favorite recreation with Dr. Francis, and to his faithful and affectionate pen we are indebted for a number of most excellent notices, and personal accounts of individuals, eminent for professional skill and learning, and for personal worth. These lives are scattered up and down several works: the Family Magazine, edited by Dr. Doane; the American Medical and Philosophical Register, edited by Drs. Hosack and Francis, Knapp's American Biography, etc. The lives we can now refer to distinctly, as from his pen, are those of Cadwallader Colden and his great uncle, Dr. Colden, Thomas Eddy, Drs. Mitchell, Miller, McNeven, Jones, Rush, Stringham, Williamson, the capital sketch of Bishop Berkeley, etc., etc. Medical biography is under real obligations to Dr. Francis, and, in this nice art, the portraiture of character, he undoubtedly excels.

Of his medical writings, (we have noticed but two of his

Hosted by Google

tracts, of general interest,) we speak on the authority of those best qualified to judge, when we give them no more than due credit for scientific accuracy, for a rich illustration of facts, for comprehensive, and often original views, and for a novel and successful application of former discoveries. Many of these have an European reputation. His medical thesis on mercury was well received at once, abroad, and his cholera pamphlet was translated into Spanish, and propagated by the authorities at Havana, during the season of the pestilence, when it was issued. At least a score of his professional articles are held in high esteem by the faculty, in Great Britain and on the continent.

Dr. Francis has, with reliable accuracy, from an intimate acquaintance with that fell disorder to which his father fell a victim, and from which he very narrowly escaped death himself, established the position of the immunity of the constitution from a second attack of yellow fever. He has written a most able paper, entitled the Anatomy of Drunkenness, the universal circulation of which would, we have no doubt, contribute in large degree to the attainment of that benevolent ideal which is the aim of the temperance societies.

At home, in one department at least, he is supreme—in all the delicate diseases of females; nor is he less successful in his treatment of a variety of disorders to which the human frame and constitution are subject.

Hosted by Google

XXXIV.

WILLIAM S. MOUNT.*

The classic comic painters of all countries are few in number. A score of masterly artists in portraiture may be enumerated for every single humorous genius in the art of design. The Flemish school, with Teniers, Ostade, Jan Steen, Gerard Douw, Brouwer, and Mieris, is undoubtedly the richest, both in number of artists and in variety of comic subjects. The Spanish school, with Murillo at the head, comes next. And although, in respect to character, expression, thought, satire and dramatic power, no one master in this department can, for a moment, be compared with Hogarth, the English school has few others to boast of. Wilkie, who approaches most nearly, was a Scotchman, as well as the great predecessor of Cruickshank, (the inimitable caricaturist of this century,) Gilray, who was the Cruickshank in political caricature of his day. Maclise is, we believe, an Irishman; and Leslie, with Newton, (delicious humorists of the school of Addison, Goldsmith, Sterne, and Irving,) delicate limners, graceful, spirited and Virgilian, displaying in their charming productions, the amenity, gentle beauties, and subtle refinements of those masters of authorship, we claim as American, partly from their early education here, and partly from their American illustrations of Irving.

The French pride themselves, and justly, on the possession of the genteel as well in painting as in style; but with all his courtly elegance, neither can Watteau be fairly considered a humorist, nor Coypel, though he has illustrated Don Quixote with so much vivacity and effect.

* 1851.

Hosted by Google

The paintings of W. S. Mount, one of the few American artists, that deserve to be called painters, are of a strictly national character; the pride and boast, not only of his native Long Island, nor yet of the State of New York solely, but of the whole country. Of an inferior grade, in the same department, are the pictures of Bingham, Ranney, Woodville, Edmonds, and Clonney, all of whom are subsequent to him, in point of time; and although several of their paintings are of great merit, evincing observation and study, full of character and expression, yet none of them can justly be compared, in point of equality, or with any fair pretensions to rivalry, with the comic designs of Mount.

Doctors of Law and Divinity, Judges and Bishops, can be easily created by conventions and councils, but a true humorist is worth a county of such dignitaries. What does the world know or care about the Dutch theologians or commentators, who carried their heads high during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? But the Dutch school of art of that period is as well known as anything in Holland, to all out of it. Those dull, learned professors, who lecture on the genius of the very men, after death has made them immortal, upon whom living they would affect to look down, talk of comic pictures as of the Ethiopian farces, as the lowest phase of intellectual effort. But how many libraries of sermons, and controversial theology, and church history, may be bought for the smallest collection of Teniers and Ostade!

Among those, too, who affect a liking for art in this walk, how few correctly appreciate it; placing the department of humorous description and comic satire below portrait and landscape, to say nothing of what passes under the style and title of history. In painting, however, as in literature, familiar history is in general far more valuable and directly

Hosted by Google

interesting than the so-called heroic phases of art. Everything depends on the artist and his mode of treatment of a subject. A great artist will make more of an ordinary scene than the inferior genius will be able to create out of the noblest materials. True, the grand style, in the hands of a Raphael, a Titian, a Rubens, is above anything of Dutch or Flemish art. We are not instituting a comparison between the divine Italians and the homely Dutchmen; rather would we oppose a first-rate artist of the actual to a second-rate painter of the ideal school. Something germane to this subject are the following remarks of Leslie, whose single authority is sufficient to decide a point of this kind. In a letter to Dunlap, he writes, speaking of Newton: "For my own part, I had much rather have been the painter of one of Sir Joshua Reynold's best portraits, or one of Claude's landscapes, than of any historical painting by Guido, Domenichino, or Annibal Carracci, I ever saw. If dramatic invention, a true expression of the passions and feelings of human nature, and a perfect knowledge of physiognomy, are to be estimated by their rarity, Hogarth was the greatest painter the world ever saw. Yet, according to the received classification, his art must take a lower rank than that of his father-in-law, Sir Thomas Thornhill, who designed the dome of St. Paul's with the history of the saint from whom the church is named." In Heine's letters we find an idea expressed so similar to this, and with such clearness, that we append it by way of corollary to the above. He is contrasting Goethe and Schiller, and in his light, fleering tone of sarcastic irony, which probes a subject as effectually as the finest serious analysis, he declares: "Those highly painted, those purely ideal forms, those altar images of virtue and morality, which Schiller has erected, are far easier to produce than those frail, every-day,

Hosted by Google

contaminated beings that Goethe reveals to us in his works. Indifferent painters ever present the full-length picture of some holy saint upon the canvas; but it requires a consummate master to paint a Spanish beggar, or a Dutch peasant suffering a tooth to be extracted, or hideous old women as we see them in the little Dutch cabinet pictures, true to life and perfect in art. The grand and fearful are of much easier representation in art than the trifling and the little. The Egyptian sorcerers could imitate many of the acts of Moses, as the snake, the blow, the frogs even; but when he did acts much more seemingly easy for the magicians, namely, brought vermin upon the land, then they confessed their inability, and said, 'That is the finger of God.'"

If any further criticism were necessary, we might add, that two exquisitely just and original critics of the present century, admirable writers upon art as well as literature, Hazlitt and Lamb, in their essays upon the works of Hogarth, have abundantly and brilliantly illustrated and confirmed this position.

A biographical sketch of the artist, whose name stands at the head of this paper, may be comprised within a brief space, the external events of his life being few, and not in any sense extraordinary. The few facts are gleaned from Dunlap's meagre notice, and confirmed on the personal authority of the artist.

The youngest of three brothers, artists, our painter, the son of a substantial Long Island farmer, was born at Setauket, Suffolk Co., Nov. 26, 1507. Up to the age of seventeen he had been bred "a farmer's boy," as he himself expresses it, and which early education sufficiently explains the character of the subjects of his art—all rural scenes of a domestic character, or, as in most cases, of out-of-door scenes and occupa-

Hosted by Google

tions. At that age, he came up to New York and commenced an apprenticeship as sign and ornamental painter, to his eldest brother, Henry S. Mount, who pursued that branch of painting, although with powers and execution much superior to it, especially excellent in pieces of still-life. Feeling no doubt an instinctive superiority to this occupation, the future artist relinquished it for a higher walk. He commenced seeking after good pictures as models, and entered a student of the National Academy of Design, 1826. The next year he returned to the country, partly on account of his health and for recreation, but chiefly from a native preference for its quiet, and the innocent pleasures it affords. As a more congenial residence, from early associations, and the proper field of his labors, no less than from its intrinsic attractions, he has always (except for a short interval) continued to reside there; coming up to the city on brief periodical visits of business.

In 1828, he painted his first picture, a portrait of himself. In 1829, recommenced painting, in New York, portraits. History early fired his ambition, and he imagined himself destined to succeed in Scripture pieces. He has not entirely relinquished this fancy yet. Liston came out in tragedy, and, as a matter of history, comic geniuses have in general made a beginning in a similar way. Time, sooner or later, corrects the error. The first painting he exhibited at the Academy was Christ raising the daughter of Jairus, followed by Saul and the Witch of Endor. But he soon found his true line. His first comic picture was exhibited in 1830—the Rustic Dance. A few years after, the judgment of the great artist of the country was thus expressed. In a letter to Dunlap, August, 1834, by *Allston*, occurs the following most judicious criticism, cordially presented: "I saw some pieces in

Hosted by Google

the Athenæum (of Boston) last year, by a young man of your city, Mount, which showed great power of expression. He has, too, a firm, decided pencil, and seems to have a good notion of a figure. If he would study Ostade and Jan Steen, and master their chiaro-oscuro, there is nothing, as I see, to prevent his becoming a great artist in the line he has chosen." Had Mount gone abroad at that time, he might very probably have learned new secrets of coloring; but as probably he would have been confused by the brilliancy of so much excellence, and, in his attempt to gain too much facility, have lost his distinctive local freshness, and untaught, natural beauties. A truly national painter might have been sacrificed to the varied accomplishments of a tasteful artist of the schools. Perhaps it was wisest for him to have remained at home. Copies of some of his most characteristic pictures might be bought up in England, by wealthy connoisseurs, at a liberal rate, and one field still remains open to him which he could worthily occupy—the Southern negro, plantation life, cornshuckings, &c. He would find open-handed patrons among the cultivated and opulent planters. His heads of negroes, in Right and Left, and the Lucky Throw, are the finest Ethiopian portraits ever put upon canvas.

Mount has painted some fifty pictures which he would be willing to acknowledge. Among the best of these are Men Husking Corn, Walking the Crack, the Sportsman's Last Visit, the Raffle, the Courtship, the Tough Story, the Barn-Floor Dance, Birding, Turning the Leaf, Undutiful Boys, Bargaining for a Horse, Cider-Making on Long Island, Boys Trapping, Nooning, Power of Music, and Music is Contagious, Just in Time, Right and Left, California News, the Lucky Throw, and Who'll Turn Grindstone? his latest efforts.

He has been so universally considered *the comic painter*

Hosted by Google

of the country, that his power in portraits has been overlooked. Portraits of Bishop Onderdonk, Rev. Drs. Seabury and Carmichael, Hon. Jeremiah Johnson, of Brooklyn, &c., attest his skill in depicting the human countenance, in catching the genuine expression of the sitter and fixing it on the canvas. One of the latest productions of the artist in this department is a portrait of E. H. Nicoll, Esq., exhibited at the annual exposition of the Academy, some years ago, and which was pronounced by Frothingham, (a master in portraiture,) to be one of the very best heads in the collection. Since then, he has just finished a head of Mrs. William Nicoll, of Islip, which has given the utmost satisfaction to the family.

Mount sometimes speaks of comic design as so slightly remunerative, on the whole, though good prices are paid for the few orders he receives, that if he should paint to satisfy himself, he would soon qualify himself for an honorary degree at that modern temple of artistic fame—the alms-house.

Doubtless many would be gratified to be immortalized to posterity, in a portrait by Mount, even if the head was not so admirably painted, with the truth and fidelity of his faces and figures in his familiar scenes. But he might, if he chose to devote himself to it, be at least as successful as many of our portrait painters, who, with a tithe of his genius, enjoy high position and command handsome prices.

To return, however, to his peculiarly original works, those which have given him an individual reputation. Some of these have been, for fifteen years or so, locked up, in private collections, which we have not seen; others we saw so long since, that we hesitate to speak of them confidently. Some ten or a dozen masterpieces, however, are familiar to us, and must be to our readers. Of these, two are in the New York Gallery, several are already engraved, two are now in Paris,

Hosted by Google

and one is now in the engraver's hands; and, during the last two or three years, some of his finest have been in the exhibitions of the Academy, the Art-Union, and the rooms of Goupil & Co.

In a brief review of his works, we cannot enter into any detailed description: a few words must suffice.

Bargaining for a Horse, in the New York Gallery, and which is to be one of the Art-Union engravings for next year, and *Nooning*, engraved by Alfred Jones, a capital engraving, appear to us his *chefs d'œuvre* in his out-of-door scenes. In the first picture, remark the diplomatic manner of the traffickers; how cool and indifferent; whittling; their attitudes, like their dress, easy and slouching.—*Nooning* is nature itself, a perfect transcript from life; how close and sultry the midday heats; how lazily lolls the sleeping negro on the hay, whose ear the boy is tickling with a straw, which produces a slightsmile! The white laborers are naturally disposed about with their farming implements. The landscape is unmistakably that of Long Island, bare and homely, yet with an air of thrift and comfort. In all of his productions, the details are carefully painted, but in some of them, separate faces or some special object form the most attractive features.

Power of Music and *Music is Contagious* are, like most of his works, of cabinet size and companion pieces. The titles tell the story, which is narrated with pictorial effect. They represent the love of music at different periods of life. The phrenological hobby of the artist is apparent in the musical bump of the negro, whose organ of tune in the second picture has been much developed. The faces of the boys are full of sweetness. *California News* is a hit at the times. A group of listeners surround the reader of an "extra," containing the miraculous developments of gold discovery at the El Dorado;

Hosted by Google

the scene, a village tavern bar-room, hung round, among other ornaments, with a handbill advertisement of a vessel up for the mines. This is, altogether, a capital thing, full of telling effects; an historical painting, though of an humble order, in the genuine sense.

Within the last year Mr. Mount has been executing orders (of which Just in Time, Right and Left, and the Lucky Throw, are three already completed) for the enterprising French publishing and print-selling house of Goupil & Co., whose agent, Mr. Schauss had the taste and judgment to select Mount, as the most national of our artists, to introduce to the French and European public. These pictures are tastefully lithographed in Paris by La Salle, a spirited hand. In this enterprise, he has ventured on the experiment of combining portrait and comic design. The heads are life-size, half-lengths; but to our eye, what they gain as portraits, they lose as humorous pictures. The classic size for comic pieces has been *diminutive*. Yet they are truly excellent, and we must add a few words by way of description.

Just in Time represents a handsome young countryman, who, violin in hand, has just hit the proper pitch. This picture is in the exhibition of the present year. It has been beautifully lithographed, and is worthy of a rural Adonis by Morland.

Right and Left is a negro fiddler calling out the figures of a dance at a ball, fully equal to the last-mentioned. The negro is a comely specimen of his race, and something of a village dandy, to boot.

The Lucky Throw—a negro who has won a goose at a raffle—inimitable for spirit, expression, details, and *coloring*. Indeed, the coloring in these last three is much superior to that in his earlier works: a fine tone is prevalent, and there is no sign of carelessness or neglect.

Hosted by Google

His last work, in this year's exhibition of the Academy, *Who'll Turn Grindstone?* illustrates a well-known apologue of Dr. Franklin, impressing the moral of the heartless conduct of worldly men towards those whose good offices they have exhausted. The countenance of the boy is *the* trait we like best in this picture. It reminds one of the amenity of Gainsborough's children, and of the faces in the *Truant Gamblers.* The barn is as natural as possible. It was painted for Mr. Sturges, the President of the New York Gallery, and a liberal patron of art.

Mount has been fortunate in his patrons—the late judicious lover and munificent friend of art, Luman Reed, Esq., his successor in the Presidency, James Lenox, Esq., Mrs. Gideon Lee, Messrs. Leupp, Goupil & Co., gentlemen of discrimination and cultivated taste. The prices he is paid are generally higher than those he places upon his productions; and yet, although handsome for this country, he would probably receive double or thrice the amount abroad.

Commonly considered indolent, he is indefatigable in elaborating his productions. Fastidious and full of conscientious integrity, he is accused of slowness by those who are ignorant of the internal, intellectual labor of the artist, who, faithful to his cherished conceptions, seeks to work them out by diligence and pains. Much is going on in the mind, while the artist may not touch his brush for days or weeks. He is also much censured for his coloring, at one time too cold, again too hot. It is true, expression and character are his fortes, coloring is *not.* Yet he is sometimes highly successful as in his later works, and almost always his coloring suits his peculiar class of subjects, which, homely and rustic as they are, neither require nor approve vivid tints.

Mr. Mount is now living at Stoney Brook, some three

Hosted by Google

miles from Setauket, on the Sound side of Long Island, with his married sister. His studio is as rustic as possible, and nothing could be more appropriate. It is in the upper story or garret of an old-fashioned cottage, a comfortable homestead, with the light artistically let in from the roof.

Mr. Shepherd Mount, well known as a successful portrait painter, for which department of his art he has a fine feeling, and especially for color, is an able and intelligent artist. His drawings and sketches are even better than most of his portraits; and, in pieces of still-life, he has done some capital things. He has also a turn for landscape. It is delightful to witness the frank and generous pride of the brothers in each other, and their family connections, an instance of brotherly sympathy and disinterestedness as rare as it is grateful.

The scenery about Stony Brook is not beautiful nor romantic, but has a certain rural charm that confirms local affection, when a more picturesque scene might fade out of the fancy. It has that ever-delicious repose of the country, that air of quiet and seclusion, so full of unobtrusive beauty to the citizen, tired of the turmoil of a town life. It was a favorite resort of the late Henry Inman. The country about here is one of the oldest settlements on the Island. It has some antiquities of its own, the chief of which is the quaint little old Caroline church, an Episcopal church, erected during the reign of George II. and named after his consort. Old farmhouses and aged people are not unfrequently met, and comfort with contentment is the ruling characteristic of the neighborhood. Here, in serenity, and in the enjoyment of social pleasures, practising a genial hospitality, with abundance of good humor and native courtesy, combining much intelligence and true natural refinement, reside a pleasant society, of which the Mount family forms the centre of attraction.

Hosted by Google

Pleasant excursions, and little parties at home or in the neighborhood, relieve the toils of the studio, the farm, the manufactory; and more real happiness is found than amid the splendid luxuries of the city.

The place of W. S. Mount, as an artist, may be considered as not easily assignable. He is an original painter, a follower of no school, an imitator of no master. But yet he may be classed generally with English painters, as partaking of certain of their qualities and as possessing similar attributes. Mount is not merely a comic painter, and by no means a caricaturist. At the same time, he is much above the most successful painter of still-life. His forte properly is rustic picturesqueness, and heightened by true humorous descriptive power. He is something akin to Wilkie, with traits of the better part of Morland and a good deal of Gainsborough in him. Some of his cabinet pieces, with a variety of figures deserve to be ranked in the same category with the admirable pictures of the Dutch and Flemish schools. Of course, we would not insult Mount by declaring such an extravagance, as that he equalled Ostade in coloring, or Denner in minute finish. The general characteristics of his paintings, however, are much the same with theirs.

A comic artist without doubt, he is still essentially a rural painter. There is nothing of the town life in his pictures: all are imbued with feeling of the country—its freshness, its foliage, its sweet airs and soul-calming secret recesses. His best works are, in a word, humorous pastorals, with sweetness and fine-tempered satire, (where there is any at all;) no bitterness, no moral obliquity or personal deformity impair their effect; they present a picture of country life, at once satisfactory for its truth and agreeable in its aspect and general features.

The character of the artist is reflected in his works,—his sweetness of temper, purity of feeling, truthfulness, gayety of

Hosted by Google

heart, humorous observation, and appreciation of homely beauties of nature that are overlooked by the common eye.

He loves to discover the good in others, in artists, especially beginners, in all pictures, and indeed in everything. He is a practical optimist, in the best meaning of the term. With maturity of judgment and character, he has the vivacity of youthful feeling and the freshness of the morning of life. A guileless, generous gentlemen, indifferent to the pecuniary rewards of his art, except so far as they insure the essential comforts of life and bring the independence he cherishes with manly spirit.

In common with all the members of his family, who inherit a turn for humor and vivacity of spirit, he is a lover of and skilled in music, plays with spirit on the violin, and is fond of all social and innocent pleasures.

His figure is tall and slight, but graceful ; his gait buoyant and springy ; his manners cordial, and full of *bonhommie ;* with a voice uncommonly musical and insinuating. Those who have not met him, may obtain a good idea of his physiognomy and expression, from the admirable head by Elliott, painted for Goupil & Co.'s gallery—a trifle too highly colored perhaps, and making him look more like a bandit than the painter, still a picturesque head of an artist, by one who well deserves that title. His smile and frank expression, both very attractive, give way in the portrait to a more elevated expression, not the habitual look. His eye is remarkably mild and intelligent ; the whole profile, in a word, is such as one fancies a painter's face should be.

In conversation, he is modest and unassuming ; his remarks are direct, full of sense, humor and feeling. He speaks hurriedly at times, and without any pedantic precision ; but his expressions are generally as pithy as his ideas are just and true.

Hosted by Google

Hosted by Google

Hosted by Google

Hosted by Google